'REWRITING WIDOWHOOD': INTERSECTIONALITY, WELL-BEING AND AGENCY AMONGST WIDOWED WOMEN IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

In an expansive feminist literature on gender and development, scholarly research on widows and widowhood remains limited, particularly within the context of Nepal. While there are some important exceptions, existing work reinforces stereotypes of widows as old and poor victims, and widowhood as essentially a marginalised and vulnerable status. This thesis seeks to confront such homogenous views and to 'rewrite' widowhood. In particular, it explores the diverse experiences of widowhood through the adoption of an intersectional life-course lens, conceptualises well-being from the embedded perspective of widows and examines the complex ways in which widowed women assert agency. This thesis is born out of a longstanding academic engagement with Nepali widows. Based upon ethnographic qualitative research, the study involved two periods of intensive research in the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. The research was operationalised through a triangulation of qualitative methods resulting in a rich evidence base of eighty-one semi-structured interviews, eighteen oral histories, five focus groups and ten key informant interviews.

This research shows that widowhood is more complex than much of the scholarship to date suggests. Key findings include the particular salience of age, caste and the life course in shaping experiences of widowhood. It demonstrates that while widows' understandings of well-being can be categorised as material, perceptual and relational, relationships with children, family and the wider community in which they live underpin all of these. This research also uncovered widows' complicated and contradictory enactments of agency that can be placed on a 'resisting-conforming' continuum, and are shaped by gendered cultural norms, eschatological beliefs, temporality and intersectional identities. This thesis contributes to more nuanced empirical and theoretical understandings of widows and widowhood, intersectionality, well-being and agency.

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I dedicate this thesis to my participants, my *didis*, thank you for your generous spirits and for the stories you shared. And to widows in Nepal more generally, who not only inspired me to do this research, but, without exaggeration, have given me my purpose in life. For this I am forever indebted, but I hope that through these words I can begin to repay you.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFN	Authors Field Notes
AR	Action research
BISWO	Bhotu-Indira Social Welfare Organisation
CDO	Care and Development Organisation
CDO	Chief District Officer
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DFID	Department for International Development
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FHH	Female Headed Household
GESI	Social Inclusion Coordinator
GIZ	German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation
HDI	Human Development Index
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IWB	Inner Well-being
PAR	Participatory Action research
PR	Participatory Research
PSD	Partnership for Sustainable Development Nepal
QMUL	Queen Mary University of London
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SLR	Single Lens Reflex
SOAS	Social of Oriental and African Studies
MWCSW	Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare
NGO	Non- Governmental Organisation
NWDA	Nepal Women's Disabled Association
NWC	National Women Commission
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund UNFPA
US-AID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee

WED	Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group
WHR	Women for Human Rights Nepal
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
WPD	Widows through Peace for Democracy

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CHAPTER 1

SITUATING WIDOWS AND WIDOWHOOD

INTRODUCTION

This research was born in my parents' living room in late autumn 2009. It was where I watched a documentary entitled 'The Living Dead' (Unreported World, 2009) which illustrated the ostracisation and plight of Nepali widows and their fight for equality. Although I have no doubt that the primary intention of the documentary was to sadden and shock, it compelled me to act. The following summer I travelled to Nepal and began what is now a six-year exploration of, and relationship with, Nepali widows. This engagement has been both academic and practical. I undertook my undergraduate and master's dissertations in Nepal, both focusing on widows and driven by a desire to raise awareness of widowhood. Alongside this academic involvement, I was also keen to provide practical support and do something positive for widowed women in Nepal. Correspondingly, in 2011, with a friend, I set up a UK based charity to fundraise for Women for Human Rights (WHR), a Nepali non-governmental organisation (NGO) which fights for equality on the basis of marital status. Funds collected though our charitable efforts have been used to support the education of widows' children and to build a shelter in the district of Nuwakot in the aftermath of the earthquake[1]. Reflecting on this now, I think that I, a 22 year old, who had only been to Nepal once before, was perhaps a little naïve or even arrogant to think that I could help or make some difference. Yet, it was this initial naivety - bundled together with enthusiasm and a desire to improve the lives of widowed women – that has led me to this doctoral research. It is important to recognise that this thesis is part of a longer interaction.

[1] Since the earthquake, for a number of practical and personal reasons I have decided to disband the charity. However, I have been supporting many organisations, including WHR, in varying capacities and will continue to do so in the future.

In this introductory chapter, I begin by defining widows and widowhood, and highlighting the socio-cultural and temporal variations in such definitions. The limited quantity of research on widows is then addressed, as is the omission of widowed women from the wider bodies of scholarly work concerned with female-headed households, poverty and the 'feminisation of poverty' and ageing and the 'feminisation of ageing.' I detail predominant stereotypes associated with widows whereby they are overwhelmingly depicted as 'old', poor and vulnerable. This leads to an identification of the research aim and objectives and a brief elaboration of the methodological framework adopted in this research. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of this thesis.

DEFINING WIDOWS AND WIDOWHOOD

It seems appropriate to first define the terms 'widow' and 'widowhood'. In short, a widow refers to a woman whose husband has deceased. Correspondingly, widowhood is the period in a woman's life-course after her husband has passed away (van den Hoonaard, 2001; van der Toorn, 2002). However, in reality defining who widows are, and identifying the period of widowhood, is much more difficult (Buitelaar, 2002). As Owen states (1996: 3), "a major problem for researchers and policy makers in developing countries is how to define widowhood". Lenette (2013: 415) further adds, "widowhood is a heterogeneous concept and is dependent on several factors such as religious beliefs, geographical location or prevailing gender norms". Thus, it is clear that meanings attached to widows and widowhood are socially constructed, varying across space and time.

Elaborating upon this further, van der Toorn (2002: 23) states that during the time of the Assyrian empire – the term widow was only used to describe a woman "if her husband and her father-in-law were dead

and she had no son." In Anglo-Saxon England, the word "*wif*" meaning a "'woman who is not a virgin" was also used to describe widowed women. Bremmer (2002: 91) further notes that the "variety of words for designating a widow suggest that such a woman occupied a place of some conspicuousness in the social relations of the Anglo-Saxons." Importantly it is this notion that widowed woman are "anomalies", out of place within the social world as a result of their lack of "direct male guardianship", that is common to many of these historic definitions (ibid.: 6 and 8). These definitions also help to explain the largely negative representations of widowed women throughout history. For example, in traditional folklore, literature and anecdotal story-telling, widowed women have been commonly associated with witchcraft and prostitution (Owen, 1996). In some countries such representations are still prevalent. In contemporary Bangladesh, "rand" is an abusive name for a widow meaning "whore" and in "French-speaking African countries, widows are called witches" [2] (Owen, 1996: 21; see also Yadav, 2016).

Scholars highlight a range of factors that determine whether a woman is identified as widowed or not. These include legal status, social customs, religious practices and familial and community based pressures, all of which vary across space. Considering these in further detail, the question is raised as to whether a woman is still widowed if she re-marries? Although remarried, she may continue to experience the emotional and social difficulties associated with her previous widowed status. Legally she may have some of the rights that are afforded to married woman and others that apply to widowed women. So, for example, she may continue to receive her widow's pension even upon remarriage. Other women who are not in possession of either a marriage and/or death certificate may struggle to secure their legal rights as widowed women.

[2] Given the negative connotations associated with word and the identity of 'widowed' in Nepal, organisations have advocated for the term 'single woman' to be used instead. The term single woman also includes women who are unmarried, separated, divorced or women's whose husbands are missing.

Differences in cultural and religious death rituals can shape whether a woman is able to mourn. Research highlights the fact that in Hindu cultures, "the rituals of death, notably burning or burial of the body" are "hugely important to ensure the passing of the soul of the dead" (Robins, 2010: 259). Traditionally, if a death is highly likely but not confirmed, Hindus will not undertake the death rituals. In this way women, who are likely to be widowed, are unable to start the mourning rituals, and are stuck in limbo between widowhood and marriage (Yadav, 2016). When the death is confirmed, but the body cannot be accessed, families may choose to make a small figurine made of *kus* (grass) to symbolise the deceased and conduct the funeral rituals (Robins, 2010). Therefore, allowing the family to mourn for the deceased.

In Zambia - widowed women are forced into levirate marriage where they have to remarry their husband's brother (Malungo, 2001). However, while these women are technically not widowed, they continue to suffer as a result of discriminatory practices associated with the death of their spouse. Furthermore, a woman's family or wider community may categorise her as widowed even while she herself might not consider herself to be so. As Owen (1996: 3) notes, women can be "regarded by their community as widows for the purpose of rituals even though they did not perceive themselves as such". In other cases women identify and define their own status. Within my research some women who were divorced or separated self-identified as 'widowed', as they felt there would be less social scrutiny of their single status if they said their husband had died. In this way it is clear then that the label of 'widow' and practice of 'widowhood' is complicated.

RATIONALISING WIDOWHOOD

Having outlined some of the complexities in identifying widows and widowhood, it is important to stress the relative lack of attention afforded to this group within academic and policy based research. In the context of policy research, Chen and Drèze (1992: 81) observe that widows are "rarely mentioned... in public debates on social policy, or even by the women's movement". This still holds largely true even over a decade later. Elaborating upon this omission, the United Nations (UN) (2001: 2) has noted that:

> "It can be said that there is no group more affected by the sin of omission than widows. They are painfully absent from the statistics of many developing countries, and they are rarely mentioned in the multitude of reports on women's poverty, development, health or human rights published in the last twenty-five years."

The Loomba Foundation has addressed this empirical invisibility to some extent in the last decade. Their recent report (2015: 1) estimates that there are 258,481,056 widows worldwide, representing a 9% increase since 2010. In South Asia, where remarriage is not widely practiced, there are an estimated fifty-seven million widows. In Nepal specifically there are an estimated 659, 837 people who have been widowed, of which 75% are women (WHR, 2010)[3].

Further, while widows are located across the Global North and Global South, widowhood is rising in the Middle East, the Caribbean, Central

[3] Given this figure, and the fact that there is little research on widows in Nepal, it is clearly important to first ground the research on widows and subsequently conduct future research on widowers. Due to the cultural and historical discrimination of widows, rather than widowers, it is important to explore their experience first. Further to this, of the 25% who are widowers many will remarry quickly and thus cease to be widowers.

America, South America, East Asia and Pacific and South Asia[4] due to an increase in women's life expectancies (Loomba Foundation, 2015).

Whilst this empirical invisibility has been acknowledged to some degree, notably the UN officially recognised 'International Widows Day' in 2010 (Loomba Foundation, 2016), widows continue to be overlooked by development organisations (Widows through Peace for Democracy (WPD), 2014). This is evidenced by the fact that while the UN's 2016 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include action points that are specifically designed to address gender discrimination - for example the eradication of female genital mutilation and forced marriage - the particular discriminatory practices associated with widowhood are *not* addressed by these goals. This has significant repercussions given that the SDGs are setting the development agenda for the foreseeable future (Moorhead, 2016; United Nations, 2016).

The limited attention within policy research to widows and widowhood is matched - or even exceeded in the opinion of some scholars - by a scarcity of academic work. As Ramnarain (2014: 2 and 3) notes, "policy literature arguably exceeds academic studies on widowhood in contexts of emergency". This academic omission is curious given an expansive feminist academic and policy based literature concerned with female-headed households and the 'feminisation of poverty'[5] (Chant, 2004, 2006 and 2008; Fuwa, 1999; Momsen, 2002). While research on female-headed households acknowledges widowhood as a key 'type' of such households, scholarly work has focused on single and/or divorced

[4] These trends are also attributed to high male mortality related to conflict and warfare. Within Nepal itself, it is estimated that a decade long civil war resulted in the death of some 16, 000 people, and most of those killed are likely to be men (BBC News, 2009).

[5] The 'feminisation of poverty' thesis proclaims that female-headed households are more likely to be impoverished. This orthodoxy was incorporated into the development agenda at the 4th United Nations Conference on Women in the 1990's (Chant, 2006).

women, rather than widowed women explicitly[6] (Chant, 1985; Chant, 1997; Chant, 2009). As Varley (2013: 115, emphasis added) argues:

> "Discussion(s) of female headship in the global south generally revert to a stereotypical image of lone mothers supporting young children and ignores the significance of widowhood as a route into household headship."

Ramnarian (2016: 80-81) further comments on this oversight, stating "few economic studies focus exclusively on widow headship".

Further to the lack of research, the predominant volume of existing scholarship has perpetuated some unhelpful stereotypes through their narrow ways of investigating widowhood. These studies homogenise widows, largely depicting them as 'elderly', poor and vulnerable. Taking these in turn, within much of the existing scholarship widows are depicted as elderly (see Dessonville-Hill et al., 1988; Drèze and Srinivasan, 1995; Jensen, 2005; O'Bryant, 1988; Rahman et al., 1992; Weir and Willis, 2000), this also reflected in the broader oversight of their multiple intersectional identities, and their primary focus on the identity of 'widowed' (see below and *Chapter 2*). In part, this can be attributed to the fact that ageing, and the 'feminisation of ageing' or 'feminisation of later life' is recognised as one of the key contributing factors to the higher incidence of widowed women worldwide (Desai, 2014; Loomba Foundation, 2015). As broader research acknowledges,

> "ageing, and the socio-cultural opportunities and challenges that manifest, are now not restricted to countries in the Global North as population ageing is taking place in nearly all the countries of the world" (United Nations, 2013: xii).

[6] It is important to note the distinction between de jure and de facto households. De jure households are identified as those where the male partner is permanently absent due to death, divorce or separation, while de facto households are those where the male partner is temporarily absent. However, a male partner can be absent for such sustained periods, and remittances can be so infrequent, that even de facto households may arguably be cast as de jure households (Moser, 1993).

Furthermore, greater female life expectancy in parts of the Global South has meant that ageing, and therefore widowhood, are becoming increasingly gendered. As the United Nations (2013: xiii) notes, older populations have a tendency to be predominantly female: "women tend to live longer than men, older women outnumber older men almost everywhere." Although Nepal is not ageing as fast as some of its South Asian neighbours like Bhutan and Bangladesh (UNFPA and HelpAge, 2012), ageing and therefore the incidence of widowhood is rising. The often significant age difference between men and women upon marriage, and the fact that women are discouraged from remarrying, means there are many more widowed women than widowed men (see also above; Varley, 2013). Yet whilst widowhood occurs through the process of 'natural' ageing, there are many younger women who are widowed 'prematurely' as a consequence of poverty, conflict, precarious labour, accidents, chronic ill-health, medical pandemics and suicide. Thus, it is vital not to equate widowhood with ageing and older women, and to recognise the complexities of ageing amongst widowed women and the distinct situation of younger widows. Although ageing within the Global South is an emerging development issue, the specific experience of widows continues to be overlooked.

A second common stereotype pertains to the 'poor widow', with the main measure of poverty relating to income poverty. Looking specifically at research on widowhood, The Loomba Foundation (2015) report details widows' deprivation in terms of income, estimating that of 258 million widows globally, 38 million are living in extreme poverty, where their basic needs are not met and they are living on "less than $1 a day" (Loomba Foundation, 2015: 39 and 41). Similarly many studies on widowhood focus on orthodox conceptions of poverty, associated with income (Drèze and Srinivasan, 1997; Holden, 1988; Weir and Willis, 2000), but also mortality rates and health (Chen and Drèze, 1992; Mari Bhat, 1994), and dispossession (Owen, 1996; Young, 2006). Many of these existing approaches used to research widowhood insinuate that widowhood is monolithic and always negative, and thus

support the 'feminisation of poverty' thesis. In addition, although in many instances widows can be poor in terms of income, the consequent effects of widowhood are multiple, extending beyond a lack of income; existing studies largely fail to account for this multi-dimensionality.

Although wider scholarship within gender and development has also shaped the associations between marital status, ageing and poverty, the specific experience of widowed women has been overlooked. The 'feminisation of poverty' orthodoxy claims that female headship is a prime cause of women's impoverishment. Thus, widowed women – a type of female-headed household – are assumed to be 'worse off' than married women. Furthermore, of the research on female-headed households research on widowhood is limited (Varley, 2013). Similarly, scholars such as Desai (2014: 459) importantly highlight the association of age and poverty, pertaining that in the Global South, "women who are unmarried (widowed, divorced, or separated) are at greater risk of economic difficulty and have to keep working to earn a living". Echoing this, Raju (2014: 202) argues that the "female elderly are more likely to be widowed, have low economic security, lower educational attainment, less labour force experience and more care-giving responsibilities than their male counterparts." Whilst valuable correlations have been made between ageing and poverty, and female-headship and poverty, there is a distinct death of research that explores the complexity of widows' experiences specifically. Furthermore, such scholarship reinforces the focus on orthodox conceptions of poverty present within existing studies on widowhood.

A third common stereotype relates to widows as vulnerable and powerless. In terms of the 'feminisation of poverty' thesis, much of the discussion of women's agency has been centred on women who are divorced or separated. As Varley (2013: 116) highlights:

> "The idea of a woman abused and abandoned by her partner but surviving and bringing up their children singlehanded has almost mythical appeal. Widows and older women do not offer such a good feminist storyline. Becoming a household head through widowhood hardly speaks to agency (not many women kill their husband…), and the lack of agency implicit in widowhood chimes with the stereotype of older women as passive and dependent."

Reflecting this, the predominant volume of research on widowhood has focused on vulnerability (Anjuli, 2011; Chen and Drèze, 1995; Mohindra et al., 2012), marginalisation (Chen, 2000; Young, 2006), discrimination (Owen, 1996) and widows as 'sufferers' (Dutt and Harma, 2010). Chen and Drèze (1992: 81) contend that a North Indian widow is a "highly marginalised person". Widows are also commonly referred to as "silent victims" (Sossou, 2002: 201) and (Dutt and Harma, 2010) entitled their book concerning the plight of widowhood, '*Invisible Forgotten Sufferers'*. Such depictions of widowed women do not 'speak to their agency'.

This portrayal of widows as powerless is also a consequence of reactions to the historic discriminatory practices inflicted upon them. It is the notion that widowed women are beyond patriarchal control, as they are not married, which arouses societal suspicion and anxiety resulting in these discriminatory practices intended to restrain and subdue them. An extreme example of such practices is *sati*[7]*.* Whilst outlawed in 1924, the legacy of *sati* is still evident in expectations associated with widowhood in contemporary Nepal (Dhungana, 2014). Consequently, a number of restrictions and exclusions have been enforced by the dominant Hindu society[8] in order to control widowed

[7] *Sati* is the "ritual immolation of a Hindu widow on her husband's funeral pyre" (Owen, 1996: 18 and 19). The practice derived from the name of a goddess (*Sati*) who first committed this ritual suicide. It was understood that by committing *sati* widows would reach Nirvana and adopt a god-like status - like the goddess after whom the practice was named. In Sanskrit the word is used as a noun, often referring to the "one who follows her husband" and is used to describe a 'devoted wife' (Dhungana, 2014: 43). Upon marriage it is traditionally understood that a woman is joined to a man, becoming half of him, hence why women change their name, move into the patrilocal home and why they committed *sati* (Lamb, 2000).

[8] Nepal has the highest percentage Hindu population in the world, where 81.34% follows Hinduism (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014: d). However, it should be noted

women (Yadav, 2016). These practices intend to 'cool' and age widows' bodies, primarily ensuring they looked less attractive to avoid further engagement in relationships, thus remaining 'devoted' to their deceased husbands (see also *Chapters 2* and *4*). Such practices are also premised upon a desire to make widowed women easily identifiable, allowing the wider public to be aware of their impurity such that these practices can be policed. These rituals are associated with embodiment, religious engagement, employment, social interaction and relationships.

In the context of embodiment, widowed women are traditionally restricted in the food that they can eat, their clothing and their adornment. Since red is the colour of marriage, and a colour that is said to 'induce heat' in the body, therefore attracting men, widowed women are not traditionally permitted to wear it (Yadav, 2016). Consequently, for the duration of their lives, widows have traditionally worn white, which "marks the end of their sexual and social life" (Yadav, 2016: 4). Notably the title of the documentary 'The Living-Dead' could have referred to the act of *sati* and its continuing presence in the form of these discriminatory rituals. This also supports Yadav's (2016) description of widows as "'ghosts' or 'invisibles' in their visually distinct white saris". However, with increasing gender equality widowed women have been permitted to wear colours opposite to red on the spectrum, like green and blue.

Restrictions inflicted upon widowed women are not limited to clothing; widows are also restrained in their accessories and jewellery they can adorn, especially those associated with marriage, for example red glass bangles, *sindur* and *pote*[9]. They are also expected to remove their *tika* and other make up which may make them look attractive. Embodied

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that whilst dominated by Hindu tradition and culture, other religions and ethnic cultures are also practiced in Nepal.

[9] *Pote* is a red beaded necklace and *sindur* is a red powder commonly worn at the hairline. Both *pote* and *sindur* are particularly symbolic as they are directly given to a woman from her husband upon marriage. *Tika* is the round circle worn between eyebrows it can be differing colours, but married women commonly wear red.

restrictions are not limited to adornment as widows are historically restricted in the food they can eat. Certain foods like "meat, fish, onions and garlic" are also said to 'heat' the body, thus widowed women are often prevented from eating them (Lamb, 2000: 126). Furthermore, given their perceived impurity, widows are constrained in their religious and cultural engagement (Yadav, 2016). For example, they are excluded from weddings and celebrations and restricted in their worship. With these spatial restrictions, widows are largely confined to the home and not encouraged to seek employment.

In the context of relationships, widows, regardless of their age, are generally discouraged from remarrying or having relationships. Further to being restricted from remarrying, widows are expected to reside in their *ghar*[10] (patrilocal home) for the rest of their lives and those who return to live in their *maiti*[11] (parental home) can be discriminated against. It is also a traditional cultural practice that widowed women are prohibited from seeing or visiting members of their *maiti* within the first year of widowhood, as doing so can bring bad luck to them. Notably many of these restrictions are rigidly enforced within the first year of widowhood; once the first annual death ritual is completed some of these are lifted or are at least less strictly imposed (see *Chapter 6*). Furthermore, with improving gender equality, the pervasiveness of these practices has somewhat weakened. In detailing such practices that aim to isolate and subdue widowed women, it is perhaps understandable why research tends to centre discussions of widowhood on these exclusions. However this thesis, rather than privileging these discriminatory practices, pays attention to the creative and nuanced ways in which widows negotiate them.

[10] Since a woman commonly moves into her husband's home upon marriage, there are two words for house in Nepali; *maiti* refers to a women's parental home, whereas *ghar* refers to her marital home.

[11] A woman may be permitted to return to live in her *maiti* if she is childless, if she does not have a brother who can support her parents, if her in-laws have died or if living in the marital home is worse than the potential discrimination she may face for going back to live with her *maiti*.

While these stereotypes of 'elderly', poor and vulnerable widows remain persistent; there is a small, but important body of work that has begun to deconstruct them. Adopting more dynamic, progressive and multi-dimensional ways of exploring widowhood, contributions from Chambers (2002 and 2005), Datta (2008), Korang-Okrah (2011), Korang-Okrah and Haight (2015), Lamb (2000), Ramnarain (2014 and 2016) and Yadav (2016) are changing the way that widowhood is researched, and consequently how widowed women are represented. My work sits within this emerging body of scholarship, advancing and progressing it through the conceptual approach taken.

RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Within the context of the preceding discussion, my research aims ***to interrogate current understandings of widowhood through the prism of intersectionality, well-being and agency.***

As mentioned widowed women are often depicted as elderly, this is reflected by wider issue that the predominant volume of work has also focused on the identity of 'widowed', and has little regard to how widowed women's experiences differ across their multiple social identities. Some scholarship has detailed how caste and age influence widowhood, but the experience of widowhood at the confluence of these identities is not considered, and other identities such as class, religion, ethnicity, locality and sexuality have been widely overlooked (see Chakravarti, 1995; Chen and Drèze, 1992 and 1995; Chen, 2000; Jensen, 2005; Martin-Matthews, 2011; Yadav, 2016).

However, scholarly work from Datta (2008), Korang-Okrah (2011), Korang-Okrah and Haight (2015) and Ramnarain (2014) has initiated attention to intersectionality. My research expands on these contributions by exploring the differing experiences in terms of caste,

religion and age, but also investigating widowhood at the confluence of other social identities. Further to this, in this research intersectional analysis is not limited to one chapter, as the way in which intersecting social identities shape conceptualisations of well-being and agential iterations and means it is considered throughout.

Related to this, existing research tends to privilege the period of widowhood. In doing so it fails to explore a woman's life prior to becoming widowed. In this way, such scholarship has parallels with the 'feminisation of poverty' thesis that largely assumes that widowed women are 'worse off' as a consequence of their widowed status. However, through their life-course approach, contributions from scholars such as Chambers (2002: 36 and 2005) and Martin-Matthews (2011) help to reveal the "multifaceted nature of widowhood", and show that widowhood is not uniformly negative. As Chambers (ibid.) notes, importantly "if we do acknowledge that widowhood is an integral part of women's lifecourse, the narratives which emerge from that life history inevitably have an impact on the current experience." With this in mind, my first research aim is to ***explore the diverse experiences of widowhood through an intersectional life-course lens.***

As stated above, through the ways in which it explores widowhood, preexisting research has predominantly reinforced the stereotype of the poor widow. However, there is an emerging body of work that investigates widowhood through a well-being lens. Yet much of this focuses on economic (Angel et al., 2007; Jensen, 2005; Ofstedal et al., 2004; Tareque et al., 2014) or physiological well-being (Bennett, 2005; Bisconti et al., 2004; Sasson and Umberson, 2014), and therefore fails to recognise the multiple dimensions of living well. Furthermore, existing studies have tended to measure well-being, rather than conceptualise it from the grassroots. My research, therefore, advances the existing body of knowledge through its multi-dimensional approach to well-being,

and aims to ***conceptualise well-being from the embedded perspective of widowed women.***

Much existing scholarship has depicted widows as discriminated against, powerless and vulnerable individuals. However, contributions from Datta (2008), Lamb (2000), Ramnarain (2014 and 2016) and Yadav (2016) have started to pay attention to the creative and nuanced ways in which widows can assert agency. Lamb (2000) and Ramnarain's (2014 and 2016) contributions are particularly seminal in illustrating the ways widowed women can simultaneously resist and conform. By detailing how widows can appropriate their identities to enact agency Ramnarain's (2014 and 2016) work is also significant. However, as none of these scholarly works has a specific theorisation of agency, my research makes an important conceptual contribution to academic work on widowhood by positing an agential continuum. The related research aim is to ***examine the multiple and complex ways in which widowed women assert agency.***

Adopting a feminist participatory methodological approach, the empirical research on which this thesis is premised involved a triangulation of key qualitative methods and two periods of intensive research in the Kathmandu Valley. During this time I undertook 81 semi-structured interviews and 18 oral histories with 91 participants, and in addition to this five focus groups and 10 key informant interviews.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The remainder of this thesis is organised around six chapters. *Chapter 2* outlines the theoretical approach undertaken. By engaging with scholarship from geography and associated disciplines, I illustrate the

importance of bringing more progressive and nuanced bodies of work on intersectionality, well-being and agency into productive dialogue to interrogate diverse experiences of widows and widowhood in Nepal. Considering each of these literatures in turn, I argue that a focus on intersectionality facilitates an unpacking of widows' identities, looking beyond the identities of 'old' and 'widowed'. Within this, I highlight the particular importance of (re) considering age, caste and life-course in this context. I then propose a well-being approach that decentres narrow income based understandings of poverty and deprivation to facilitate a more multi-dimensional and dynamic way of investigating the lives of widows. To deconstruct the portrayal of widows as vulnerable and powerless, I explore the importance of introducing a more nuanced approach to gendered agency, one that looks beyond the 'romance of resistance'. In sum, this chapter illustrates both how a nexus of intersectionality, well-being and agency facilitate an unpacking of the heterogeneity of widows and widowhood, as well as how conceptualisations of each of these can themselves be furthered through a focus on widowhood.

I set out my methodological framework in *Chapter 3*, explaining how and why I deployed a feminist participatory approach to research widows and widowhood in practice. I detail my use of a multi-method approach and how these methods complemented each other to form a rigorous triangulation. I then locate the conceptual, cultural and practical challenges of undertaking this research. Within this I pay particular attention to the critical role of interpreters, and stress the importance of *writing them* in. I also detail some of the challenges with the process of interpretation and translation itself. This chapter also highlights the sensitivity of this research topic; my personal relationships with participants and experience of living in Kathmandu are also explained. Finally, this chapter illustrates the various stages of analysis.

Chapter 4 illustrates the multiple social identities that shape widowhood. I first introduce the participants highlighting their heterogeneity by exploring some baseline demographic information, for example, their age, caste, religion and education. This is further contextualised by situating these social identities within contemporary Nepali society. The main identities that shape widowhood, namely caste and age are then traced. Within discussions of caste, further references to religion are also made, and the unique situation for Newari women is identified. The way in which current age and age when widowed shapes widowhood is then explored, and within this discussion of age there is a more specific investigation of the complexity of ageing, and how widowed women can experience both progressive and regressive ageing. While age and caste are the main social identities discussed, the experience of widowhood at the confluence of other social cleavages will be highlighted throughout. Importantly, by exploring widows' life-courses, this chapter highlights the multiple and diverging ways in which widowhood is experienced, and how it is not always only, or overwhelmingly, negative.

Embedded conceptualisations of well-being are presented in *Chapter 5*. I begin by broadly discussing how participants conceptualised well-being or a 'good life' (see *Chapter 3*). These conceptualisations are then more specifically explored in the context of 'material', 'perceptual' and 'relational' well-being, and the various points at which they interrelate and overlap are delineated. Within this chapter the patterns between subjective conceptions of well-being, intersecting identities and life-courses will also be illustrated. Furthermore, the ways in which relatedness and relationships underpin understandings of well-being are examined throughout.

Chapter 6 presents the multiple ways in which widowed women articulate their agential capacity. By tracing the embodiment, spatial, social and intimate restrictions enforced upon widowed women this

chapter highlights the complexity of, and ways in which, widows' actions can be simultaneously perceived as 'resisting' and 'conforming'. Understood as such, I argue that such iterations are better understood as part of an 'agential continuum', and that these practices can be understood as being arranged in a hierarchy. Widows' agential capacities are assessed in relation to gendered cultural norms, intersectional identities, socio-cultural context, eschatological beliefs and temporality throughout.

By illustrating the ways that my research contributes empirically, theoretically, methodologically and 'practically' to understandings of widows and widowhood, *Chapter 7* concludes this thesis. Revisiting one particular research participant, Rekha, I reiterate the value of an intersectional, well-being and agency approach, and argue that successive research on widowhood needs to align itself in such a way. By outlining the conclusions of thesis, the contributions it makes to scholarship on widowhood specifically, and to geography, gender and development studies more broadly, will be detailed. I then posit the methodological and policy based contributions of this work. I finish by exploring the various means of dissemination and how I hope they will improve the lives of widowed women.

CHAPTER 2
THEORISING WIDOWHOOD: A NEXUS OF INTERSECTIONALITY, WELL-BEING AND AGENCY

It is evident that extant academic research is not only limited, but also narrow in terms of its conceptual focus. Situated within a smaller more critical body of work, this research proposes a theoretical nexus that incorporates the concepts of intersectionality, well-being and agency to unpack the diversity of widows and widowhood. This chapter details each of these concepts in turn, tracing their genealogy both within geography and associated disciplines including feminist and development studies. In doing so, it emphasises how such a theoretical approach facilitates more nuanced understandings of widows and widowhood. A focus on intersectionality decentres gender, and subsequently marital status, as the defining feature of widows' identities; an emphasis on well-being shifts attention from narrow income-based measures of poverty to more non-material, relational and embedded understandings of what well-being means for widows; while an agency based perspective is essential in uncovering subtle - and not so subtle - forms of conforming to and resisting a range of discriminatory practices associated with widowhood. Whilst these approaches bring much to the study of widows and widowhood, the chapter also seeks to highlight how the theories themselves can be further developed through a focus on widows and widowhood.

EXPLORING AN INTERSECTIONAL LIFE-COURSE APPROACH

International recognition of women as a development category and as an 'object' for concern can be traced back to the 1st UN Conference of Women in Mexico in 1975. However, it was the 4th conference in 1995 where the disproportionate burden of poverty experienced by women was first officially and institutionally acknowledged (Chant, 2008). This conference was framed around a now famous declaration that women

represent 70 percent of the world's poor, this is also known as a the 'feminisation of poverty' (ibid.). Since it was first included within the development debate, there has been a significant progress in terms of how feminists have understood and researched women's lives.

Central to this, has been the shift from looking at *women* to *gender* more broadly. Such a focus on gender highlights that the gendered roles of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are socially constructed, fluid and dynamic (McIlwaine and Datta, 2003). Furthermore, an emphasis on gender rather than on women helps to reveal the complex dynamics and power relations that contribute to women's and men's inequality under patriarchal structures (ibid.). Importantly for this research, Connelly et al. (2000) note how a gendered perspective also draws attention to the different ways women experience oppression according to their race, class and other social cleavages.

Gender and development scholars have paid increased attention to women's diverse identities, extending beyond their gendered positions (Carastathis, 2014; Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005). Yet, it is clear that this was not always the case; early writings in feminism "claimed to speak universally for all women", thus tended to privilege the 'female' over other social positionings (McCall, 2005: 1771). However, increasing attention to the multiple identities of women has meant that, while gender is still recognised as being important, it is now acknowledged as one of women's and men's numerous identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008).

The term intersectionality[12] can be traced back to Crenshaw's (1989) work that developed in response to limitations within American law

[12] There are other theorisations and approaches which are similar to intersectional analysis, but are not necessarily labelled as such, for example 'interlocking systems', 'multiple positionings', 'multiple jeopardies' and 'multiple identities' also bring attention to women's varied identities. Feminist endeavours to highlight the multidimensionality of women's identities can be traced back as far as the early 20th

that dealt with race and gender discrimination separately. She argued that the "multi-dimensionality of Black women's experiences" should be explored, rather than the "single-axis analysis that distorts these" (ibid.: 139). Since its conception, primarily in terms of an intersection of racial and gender identities, research on intersectionality has gained traction, with other aspects of social identities gradually incorporated into analysis. Thus, a more contemporary definition of intersectionality is "the relationship among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall, 2005: 1771)

Reflecting back on the origins of intersectionality in the 1980s, the field of critical race studies emphasised that although feminist struggles were gaining increased momentum, and this was uniting women globally, the various differences *between* women were being ignored. Black and Asian feminists particularly criticised the way white, middle class women dominated the feminist narrative, and how they depicted 'women of colour'. Illuminating homogenised representations of 'third world' women and women of colour, and how their multiple identities were consequently overlooked, Mohanty (1988: 61, emphasis added) stresses how the "Third World Woman" has become "a singular monolithic subject in some recent *(Western)* feminist texts". Given such criticisms, it is unsurprising that early research on intersectionality was particularly attentive to how gender and race were mutually constituted.

Over the decades new social identities have been incorporated into intersectional analysis. Coining the term 'capitalist patriarchy', Mies (1986) illustrates the connections between patriarchy and capitalism, and how both systems serve to uphold each other, and particular social, political, cultural and economic institutions. Deploying the

century. Deborah King (1988: 42) cites how "in 1904 Mary Church Terell", wrote, "not only are colored women…handicapped on account of their sex, but they are almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their race". Thus, it is clear that notions of multiple identities and oppressions developed before the specific birth of 'intersectional' theory itself.

intersectional triangulation of gender, race and class, hooks (1981) argues that women's oppression under slavery could be largely explained in relation to the nexus of these three social identities. Both hooks (1981) and Mies (1986) were critical in cementing the importance of the intersection between gender, race and class into feminist theory; and their work arguably formed the basis for further "axes of inequality" to be incorpoated into intersectional analysis (Veenstra, 2011: 1).

In the 1980s, lesbian feminists rallied against the heteronormativity of much feminist research, arguing that sexuality was also key to understanding women's situated experiences (Veenstra, 2011). Further social identities have been incorporated into intersectional analysis including nationality (Pratt, 2002) and "citizenship status, religion, disability, and age" (Veenstra, 2011: 2). Furthermore, Davis (2008: 81) cites how Helma Lutz (2002),

> "has provided a list of no less than fourteen lines of difference (gender, sexuality, race or skin colour, ethnicity, national belonging, class, culture, religion, able-bodiedness, age, sedentariness, property ownership, geographical location, and status in terms of tradition and development)".

In this way, intersectional theory illustrates that in addition to gender, there are multiple other dimensions of social identity which are equally important in shaping women's and men's lives. From this perspective, "it is impossible to talk about gender without considering other dimensions of social structure/social identity that play a formative role in genders operation and meaning" (Shields, 2008: 303). However, although these new social cleavages have been integrated and advocated for, the race-class-gender triangulation still dominates the intersectional narrative (Valentine, 2007).

Since its conception, intersectionality has been deployed in various fields within gendered research including studies on migration (Anthias, 2008; Bastia, 2014), health (Hankivsky, 2012), gender-based violence (Josephson, 2004) and citizenship (Rottmann and Ferree, 2008; Welsh et al., 2006). Evidently, an intersectional approach is suitable for gendered research for a number of reasons, the most significant, and perhaps obvious, being the acknowledgement of differences *between* and *amongst* women. Phoenix (2006, cited in Kathy Davis, 2008: 70) contends, intersectionality "aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it", and promises to address the persistent exclusions of other forms of identities - beyond gender - within feminist research and practice. hooks (1981: 12) further illustrates its importance:

> "We cannot form an accurate picture of woman's status by simply calling attention to the role assigned to females under patriarchy. More specifically, we cannot form an accurate picture of the status of black women by simply focusing on racial hierarchies."

Thus, intersectionality dismantles unilateral categorisations of women, supporting greater acknowledgement of their heterogeneity. In turn, the inclusion of multiple dimensions such as race, class, age, religion and sexuality within intersectional theory has arguably catalysed the mainstreaming of gender based issues in disciplines beyond feminist studies, including race studies, economics, linguistics, gerontology, theology and sexology. Thus it has provided "the basis for a mutually beneficial collaboration between theoretical projects which had previously found themselves on somewhat uneasy footing" (Davis, 2008: 74). Within feminist studies itself, this enabled the development of a "new platform - 'a joint nodal point' - for disparate theoretical approaches within feminist scholarship" (ibid.).

Another contribution of intersectional theory to gendered scholarship is its innate attention to culturally embedded perspectives. As a result of this greater appreciation of women's multiple social cleavages, other voices beyond those of white, middle class feminists have emerged. Furthermore, through this more grassroots, 'geographical' and situated thinking, the socio-cultural formations of places, and the myriad identities and lives of the women who inhabit them, have been increasingly acknowledged. Such a perspective importantly decentres gender as the sole or primary focus of interest facilitating more holistic and embedded interpretations of individual identities. Furthermore, unduly focusing on or privileging certain identities could lead to misinterpretation where others are elided. For example, (1982: 214) stresses that instead of seeing the family as a site of oppression, feminists should recognise "how the black family has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression".

An intersectional approach, therefore, prevents the researcher from pre-determining the important social cleavages and allows the "endless constellations of intersecting lines of difference to be explored" (Davis, 2008: 77). Additionally, the increased attention to local cultural perspectives supports the feminist participatory motivations of this research, and also helps to uncover agency. As Ramnarain (2014: 10) states "homogenizing accounts of widowhood obscure the spaces carved out for action by widows in their everyday lives, at the intersections of class, caste, age, and ethnicity". Given the agential concerns of this research such privileging of embedded experiences is essential.

Whilst an intersectional framework is important for studies associated with gender, there are some limitations. The first and foremost is that while it is relatively easy to theorise, it is difficult to deploy it in practice. Central to this is the additive nature of intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2006), where one dimension of identity acts as a

"foundational category" and others are added to it (Carastathis, 2014: 307). In this way, one particular identity is privileged, while others become secondary, peripheral and/or additive. In her seminal text '*Inessential Woman*,' Spelman (1988: 125) highlights:

> "Sexism and racism must be seen as interlocking, and not as piled upon each other, serious problems arise for the claim that one of them is more fundamental than the other".

However, in the context of feminism, gender is often seen as the most important social identity and is therefore made central. Yet, not all women necessarily agree with this, Carby (1982) argues that black women may be more oppressed as a result of their race rather than their gender. Given these critiques there is "great skepticism about the possibility of using categories in anything but a simplistic way" (McCall, 2005: 1773). To counter this, there is a need to trace the connections and constellations between the dimensions, rather than viewing them hierarchically.

There is also debate on whether intersectionality should apply to all subjects or should be focused only on "marginalized subjects" (Nash, 2008: 6). Some argue that it should focus on the voices of marginal people precisely because they are 'marginal'. However, this could lead to the dangerous territory of *assuming* marginality and the continuous and unchanging oppression of subjects. Therefore, the movement out of marginality, and the potential benefits that it may bring, can be overlooked. This is particularly pertinent since widowhood does not necessarily result in marginality and oppression, but can, in fact, result in inclusion and certain privileges in some specific cases. Hence for the purpose of this research, intersectional analysis will be used as a tool for understanding social identities that may contribute in differing ways to marginalisation *and* privilege.

The inevitable - and perhaps ironic - caveat of current theorisations of intersectionality is the lack of attention to multiple intersections. Intersectional theory has predominantly focused on, and privileged, certain dimensions of social identities. Arguably class, race, and, to some degree, sexuality have dominated the narrative. Social cleavages such as caste and age, that are particularly important to this research, have been only partially explored in comparison.

Caste and Religion

While there is a significant body of work on caste within gender studies (see, for example, Cameron, 1998; Chakraborty, 2003; Jacoby and Mansuri, 2011; Kodoth, 2008) an incorporation of caste within intersectional theory is limited to the research of Brewer et al. (2011), Haq (2013), Kumar (2010) and Nightingale (2011). Caste can be described as a "social organization prevalent in India *(and South Asia)* that creates a well-defined social ordering" (Jensen, 2005: 359, emphasis added). Although intricately connected, caste and class are not synonymous. Belonging to a 'high' caste, does not necessarily equate to having a high income. Correspondingly, while a person may be of 'low' caste, through their business and trading a peasant can turn into a wealthy merchant, and thus achieve a higher-class position while they are still considered to be 'low' caste (Bukharin, 2011). Bukharin uses the historical example of landlords and noblemen to illustrate the differences between class and caste; landlords and their property ownership are defined through their economic position (class), whereas noblemen and their estates are defined through their legal-political position (caste). However, as a consequence of social and financial exclusion on the basis of caste, there are parallels between class and caste. Not only are there connections between caste and class, but people of certain castes tend to belong to certain religions, ethnicities, speak particular languages and dialects and reside in certain

areas; thus caste, ethnicity, religion, class, language and locality are deeply entangled (see Hangen, 2010).

Although there are some common parallels with the Indian system, it is important to detail Nepal's distinctive caste structure. Pradhan and Shrestha (2005: 1) stress:

> "Nepal is, in essence, a cultural mosaic comprising different caste and ethnic groups belonging to the Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan linguistic families, which is indicative of the waves of migrations that have occurred for over 2000 years from the north and south respectively".

Originally Indo-Aryan settlers brought the caste system to Nepal during a period known as 'hinduisation' or 'sanskritisation' (Bennett et al., 2008). Traditionally, the Indo-Aryan caste system included four main groups: namely "Brahman (priests and scholars), Kshatriya (or Chhetri, rulers and warriors), Vaisya (merchants and traders) and Sudra (artisans and laborers)", with further sub-castes existing within each of these four groups (Shrestha, 2002: 92). Whilst the caste system was initially a Hindu religious system, due to the increasing dominance of Hinduism within Nepal, it started to pervade culture and everyday life more broadly. It thus became more than a religious structure, morphing into a more generalised form of societal organisation.

Reflecting the increased complexity of the caste system, Nepal is now home to an estimated "103 caste and ethnic groups" (Pradhan and Shrestha, 2005: 2). Furthermore, specific groups of people have been incorporated over a period of time. Newari people are indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley and are of Tibeto-Burman origin. Although they were originally Buddhist, most Newars, as evidenced in this research, now primarily identify themselves as Hindus. Over the years, Newari people have been influenced by the Hindu Indo-Aryan customs, thus Newari culture can be described as a fusion of Tibeto-Burman and Indo-

Aryan cultures, and of Buddhist and Hindu religious traditions (Whelpton, 2005). Furthermore, due to the influence of the Indo-Aryan caste system, Newari people have subsequently developed their own distinctive system of social stratification; thus in present day Nepal, 'high' caste Newaris can be considered on par with 'high' caste Brahmans (ibid.).

Given that caste is much more than merely a religious system of organisation, but a system which pervades Nepali society and culture more broadly, other ""non-Hindu groups" for example Christians, Buddhists and Muslims are also impure" (Lawoti, 2005: 101). Due to this coupling of faith and caste, these groups were also incorporated into the caste system, and the caste position ascribed to them was uniformly at the 'lower' level (Lawoti, 2005). As a result, caste, ethnicity and religion are inextricably interlinked, making differentiation on these bases difficult (Nightingale, 2011). This is reflected on a day-to-day basis, as Nepali people do not distinguish between 'caste' and 'ethnicity'. Therefore, discussions of caste should also consider ethnicity, religion and, arguably, language, since language also varies according to caste and ethnicity.

The dichotomous relationship between purity and impurity, and their association with (un)touchability, lies at the heart of the caste system in both India and Nepal alike. 'Untouchables', those of 'lower' caste[13], are seen to be impure and therefore retain their low position in the caste system as a consequence of this. Describing purity Nightingale (2011: 155) maintains:

[13] The term 'lower' caste is still used in everyday Nepali and within this research, participants also frequently referred to caste in the context of 'higher' or 'lower'. So whilst the term will be used within this thesis it does so with consideration of its problematic nature and the way in which it can perpetuate the notion that some groups are 'lower' than others.

> "Normative social differences are founded on a number of intersecting ideologies and prominent among them is ritual purity", where "people experience various forms of social oppression and privilege based on their 'purity'."

Practices associated with caste and purity transcend everyday life, and are evident within households, work places, religious and cultural events and social interactions. These practices form boundaries and segregated spaces between those who are 'pure' and those who are 'impure', reinforcing the caste system.

Typically people of 'high' caste come under greater social pressures to fulfill and adhere to cultural and religious traditions in order to maintain their purity. Even though 'lower' caste and indigenous people do, to varying degrees, practice Hinduism there is less pressure on them to adhere to traditions. In other cases, 'lower' caste people totally reject Hindu traditions on the basis of the historic discrimination they have faced, and some have even converted to Christianity (International Labour Organisation (ILO) Nepal, 2005). It should be noted, however, that since such practices associated with caste have been subsumed into Nepali culture more broadly, such groups might feel somewhat obliged, culturally rather than religiously, to follow them.

Importantly for this research, patriarchy also underpins caste systems, and is inextricably linked with notions of purity, (un)touchability and the perpetuation of power. Akin to caste, patriarchy permeates multiple spheres and is thus woven into all aspects of everyday life. "Brahmanical patriarchy" is found within Hindu cultures and is the complex intersection between caste and gender where the two systems co-exist mutually reinforcing one another (Chakraborty, 2003: 34). Although women are of differing castes, they are generally perceived as having a lower status and being more impure than men. Due to the higher possibility of 'contamination' with the wider environment that can result from menstruation, sexual intercourse and childbirth,

women are - regardless of their caste - perceived to be more 'impure' than men. This explains why they have to work harder than men to rid themselves of such "everyday impurities" (Lamb, 2000: 260; see also Gesier, 2005). This helps to explain the intricate relationship between caste and patriarchy, and how these systems reinforce one another.

Further explaining the differences between castes in the context of gender, Enslin (2014: 31) states, "because lower caste women had less ritual purity to lose, women in them generally experienced fewer constraints on sexuality and marriage". Many indigenous groups in Nepal also follow Buddhism, and thus they are similarly less tied to Hindu religious practices that can be discriminatory towards women. Whilst there are fewer expectations on 'lower' caste women within the household and extended family, they face other kinds of restrictions and discrimination within the community and broader society. Geiser (2005: 22) explains:

> "Women belonging to indigenous groups have more rights within the private sphere, whereas Hindu women are restricted by the Hindu ideology of purity and impurity. In the public field, the situation is reversed. Here women with an ethnic background face (due to additional ethnic discrimination) greater economic and political disadvantages than women who belong to higher castes"

Purity associated with caste and patriarchy is also reflected in the forms of gender discrimination connected to widowhood (Chakravarti, 1995). Although a woman's caste does not change upon widowhood, widows are deemed impure and are expected to abide by certain norms that are grounded within both systems, this includes restrictions related to adornment, food consumption, employment, social interactions and religious practices (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2009; Chakravarti, 1995; Lamb, 2000). Given the discussion above, it is perhaps unsurprisingly that in order to preserve this "brahmanical patriarchy", there are more restrictions on 'higher' caste widows (Chakravarti, 1995: 2251). Reflecting this, scholarly work that explores the influence of caste in

shaping of widowhood predominantly focuses on 'high' caste widows (Chen and Drèze, 1992, 1995; Datta, 2008; Haviland et al., 2014; Lamb, 2000; Jensen, 2005 and Mari Bhat, 1994; Sabri et al., 2016).

Within the Nepali context, extensive discussions of caste and widowhood are minimal. In turn, and reflecting the broader trend, the focus of much of this work is on middle and 'higher' caste groups (see Galvin, 2005; Haviland et al., 2014; Ramnarain, 2014 and 2016; Sabri, 2016) with the exception of Yadav (2016). As such, the particular experiences of Newari widows, who comprised a significant proportion of the research participants, are yet to be researched. Further to this, religion, which is inextricably linked to caste, is rarely mentioned, with the exception of Galvin (2005), within current studies on widowhood in Nepal; this thesis progresses existing research by tracing how religion shapes widowhood.

Age and Ageing

Like caste, academic theorisations on age and ageing within the context of intersectionality are limited: "feminist scholars tend to privilege race, class, and gender as the primary forms of inequality worthy of serious attention, neglecting age" (Utrata, 2011: 619). Given the focus of this thesis, age and the process of ageing are critical. As highlighted in *Chapter 1*, population ageing is accelerating in the Global South, and is becoming increasingly gendered. To this end, the incidence of widowhood is rising, and widowed women are becoming increasingly older (Desai and Tye, 2009). Whilst explorations of age are limited within intersectional theory, there is a broader literature - beyond the explicit realm of intersectional analysis - that aids this current research.

Desai (2014: 460) maintains that "the experience of ageing and the impact of ageing on development are complex, difficult to predict and highly dependent on context". The complicated and subjective nature of ageing is further articulated by Tarrant (2010: 1582):

> "For the individual, age is constructed and understood from numerous perspectives, meaning that people define their age in multiple ways: biologically, chronologically and/or socially 'old'".

Vera Sanso (2006) highlights how ageing can be understood as 'functional', which is socially constructed, and 'generational', which is based on normal physiological processes. She also argues that ageing is experienced differently according to socio-cultural spaces and across the life-course (Hockey and James, 1993; Hopkins and Pain, 2007). Alongside such debates on the social construction of age and ageing, Hopkins and Pain (2007: 288) argue for a notion of *relational* ageing:

> "If we think about and work with age as being produced in the interactions between different people, then it becomes more difficult to talk about the geographies of children, older people or anyone else in isolation."

Such a positioning stresses that ageing is not an isolated process occurring within an individual vacuum, rather it is a dynamic process that reflects the shifting connections between individuals. Given the importance of relationships to societal functioning and identity construction within South Asia such an understanding of ageing is essential.

It is also important to explore recent studies associated with gendered ageing in South Asia more broadly. The patriarchal cultures within South Asia are also highly hierarchical, in that the power does not only predominantly lie with men but also with older generations. Thus, as a woman ages, although she may receive less respect than a man of a similar age, she receives more respect than a woman younger than her.

In her scholarly work on 'patriarchal bargains', Kandiyoti (1988: 279) maintains that a "woman's life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law". Consequently, in her work on ageing in West Bengal, Lamb (2000) contends older women within households in South Asia have been commonly stereotyped as villains and powerful matriarchs who dominate their daughter in-laws. However, Lamb (2000) and Desai and Tye (2009: 1014) challenge this dynamic, illustrating "how the balance of power in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship" is shifting "towards the younger woman". This can be partly explained by the rise of nuclear families in South Asia which means that older men and women do not necessarily have children to take care of them, hence their increasing vulnerability (Desai and Tye, 2009). Thus, the experience of gendered ageing is played out within these changing intergenerational dynamics.

Within the specific context of widowhood, researchers highlight a range of embodied, social and religious practices that are designed to effectively age the body irrespective of the biological age of widows. Such practices are particularly evident in Hindu cultures and are designed to control widows' sexual lives. As detailed above, the biological processes that cross the 'boundaries' of women's bodies such as menstruation, sexual intercourse and childbirth mean that women's bodies are said to be more 'open' than men's. Through their greater production of sexual fluids, women's bodies are also deemed as being more 'hot' than men's. This 'heat' generally refers to sexual desires, and given that women are said to be hotter than men, there is a greater perceived need to control them (Lamb, 2000; Yadav, 2016).

Since widowed women do not have husbands to satisfy this 'sexual heat', society perceives their desires as unmet and therefore uncontained (Buitelaar, 2002). In order to control their sexual heat

widowed women previously committed *sati*, and in contemporary Hindu societies *sati* has been replaced by embodied, relational, social and religious restrictions. These practices are intended to prematurely *cool, close* and, therefore *age* the body, serving a dual interrelated purpose of ensuring that widows remain devoted and faithful to their dead husbands by virtue of being unattractive to other men (see Lamb, 2000; Yadav, 2016).

This sexual heat, and sexual interest, supposedly dissipates as women age and come closer to the menopause, consequently some older married women may also choose to wear cooler colours like widowed women (Yadav, 2016). Through their work comparing childhood and old age, Hockey and James (1993) illustrate the ways in which both children and older people are depicted as sexually disinterested. Given these practices that intend to age the body, the experience of ageing is particularly complicated for *young* widows. Whilst these women are functionally young, practices related to widowhood render them as socially old, and thus there is a disjuncture between their life stage and their social and familial role. Lamb (2000: 222, emphasis added) stresses how the "fetters of widowhood served to transform them *(young widows)* socially, before the time naturally determined by physiology, into old women".

Lamb's (2000) research is the only known study on widowhood that examines the complexity of ageing within a Hindu context; importantly, to date, there is no known work on the ageing of Nepali widows. Whilst important, Lamb's contribution largely implies that widowed women necessarily feel older because of these socio-cultural expectations and practices associated with 'cooling' their body. She does not, however, explore the ways in which widowed women can experience a renewed sense of youth upon widowhood. Although not centred on Hindu widows, DiGiulio's (1989: 30) research explores how some widowed woman can have an "identity rebirth" upon widowhood, and how their

new single identity can inspire a greater sense of independence, assertiveness and competence. Thus, this research progresses Lamb's study by not only focusing on the progressive experience of ageing amongst Hindu widows, but by considering the potentiality for 'regressive ageing'.

As detailed in *Chapter 1*, much of the existing research failed to look beyond the identity of 'widowed' and the period of 'widowhood', thus overlooking the multiple social identities and histories that shape women's lives. Such limited perspectives also mean that much of the literature typically associated widowhood with older women (see Chen, 2000; Drèze and Srinivasan, 1997; Jensen, 2005; Rahman et al., 1992; O'Bryant, 1988; Dessonwille-Hill et al., 1988 and Weir and Willis, 2000). Additionally, the issue of widowhood has often been discussed amongst problems associated with older women, but has only rarely been seen as an issue for middle aged and younger women. However, a growing number of studies have started to explore the experience of this cohort (see Doherty and Scannell-Desch, 2008; Haase, 2008; Lamb, 2000; Lenette, 2013; Lowe and McClement, 2010; Schatz et al., 2011). Interestingly, specifically in the Nepali context, the focus has been almost entirely on younger widows (Haviland et al., 2014; Ramnarain 2014, 2016 and Yadav, 2016 and Sabri, 2016), and the experience of older widows in this case remains overlooked.

Thus there is an inherent need, within the Nepali context and beyond, to explore widowhood amongst varying generations. Within her work on widowed refugee women in Australia, Lenette (2013: 415) argues the need for "contemporary understandings of widowhood" to "encompass further experiences of young and middle-aged widows, as their issues are distinct from older widows' concerns and are likely to exist for a longer period of time". Similarly Lamb (2000) details the need to acknowledge the differing experiences of widowhood for younger and older women. This work builds on this scholarship by

investigating widowhood according to different physiological life-stages, and particularly within the Nepali context it expands on existing research that has predominantly focused on young widows.

While research has focused on widows as 'older', which is a product of a wider issue of the lack of attention to their intersectional identities, there is a small body of work that has started to incorporate a more 'intersectional' approach, and it is important to detail how it informs this research (see Datta, 2008; Korang-Okrah, 2011; Korang-Okrah and Haight, 2015; Ramnarain, 2014). These contributions stress the critical significance of intersectionality in revealing the lived realities of widowhood, in tracing agential pursuits and, importantly, in paying tribute to the complex and varying identities of widowed women. In highlighting the benefits of an intersectional approach, Korang-Okrah (2011) in her work on Ghanaian widows and property rights, stresses how intersectional theory was "applied to identify and understand the widows' multiple, layered identities, their social locations and subsequent lived experiences of challenges confronting them".

These contributions are important and do go some way towards integrating an intersectional approach. However, Datta (2008), Korang-Okrah (2011), Korang-Okrah and Haight (2015) and Ramnarain's (2014) participants' engaged in their studies according to particular criteria. In Datta's case all of the women involved in her study lived in a housing colony in Delhi, in Korang-Okrah's research all of the participants had been widowed in the last ten years and Ramnarain's research participants were all young women of working age who also headed their household. Evidently these criteria meant that these women had at least one specific commonality, whereas the current research has explored the diverse identities based on varying castes, classes, ages, localities, religions and reasons for widowhood, not choosing participants based on any criteria besides being widowed. Thus, this research contributes to, and advances this small body of

scholarship through its intersectional approach. Further to this, in the case of this work, intersectionality is not limited to one chapter, as the way in which intersectional identities shape conceptualisations of well-being and enactments of agency means it transcends this thesis.

A Life-course Approach: Decentring 'Widowhood'

As illustrated in *Chapter 1*, this research adopts an intersectional life-course approach. The life-course[14] is defined as a "sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time" (Giele and Elder, 1998: 2). Although biological processes of ageing largely define the life-course, these processes vary spatially and temporally and are influenced by socio-cultural, economic and political conditions. Further detailing the individual nature of the life-course, Harrigan et al., (2012: 386) stress that the life-course is "constructed by the choices and actions individuals take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances". Such a life-course positioning gives equal importance to the past, present and future, acknowledging that people do not arrive at events and periods in their life dissociated from their past.

In recent years feminists have advocated for the adoption a life-course approach to better understand gendered well-being (Collis, 2007; Hockey and Draper, 2005 and Wright, 2011a). Feminist scholars have been particularly seminal in illustrating how a life-course perspective can help to dismantle the common feminist tendency to centre women's lives around their child rearing/bearing years (Monk and Katz, 1993). A life-course perspective is particularly salient given that this research explores widowhood - a period often overlooked by feminists as it is generally after child-rearing years. Further to this, feminists have

[14] It is important to note the distinction between life-course and relational ageing; relational ageing is understood in conjunction with other people, whereas life-course focuses more explicitly on an individual's life and its trajectory.

argued that a life-course perspective is particularly important in highlighting the significance of context, space and place in shaping an individual's life-course; "change throughout the life course is based not only on biology, but in experiences of family, community and history" (Monk and Katz, 1993: 19 and 20).

Given that widowhood is a period in the life-course and a life transition, scholarship on life transitions also aids this thesis. Life transitions are traditionally described as major life events such as birth, leaving home, marriage, parenthood, divorce and widowhood. The benefit within life-course analysis of diverting attention from the prescribed periods is mirrored in particular perspectives adopted within life transitions. More nuanced interpretations highlight how a prescriptive chronology discounts the varied, unpredictable and complex ways in which life transitions actually occur. As Hörschelmann (2011: 381) stresses:

> "There is much to be gained from paying closer attention to the seemingly banal or mundane…more subtle and less easily recognisable changes are just as important in shaping the course of our lives, whether or not they lead to transformations which are subsequently perceived as substantive and life changing".

This non-linear approach opens up the opportunity to explore diverse events and the unexpected twists and turns that life can bring. Such non-linear perspectives are relevant for widowed women who are physiologically young and do not follow a 'normal' life-course trajectory. In addition, akin to a life-course perspective, shifting attention away from seemingly 'significant' life events or life stages facilitates a more embedded approach and can reveal other important experiences and identities. This helps in achieving a more holistic means of researching social identities, well-being and agency. Furthermore, linearity is, in many ways, tied to the Eurocentric obsessions with 'progress' and is subsequently less appropriate for a South Asian context where time is more circular (Helman, 2005). This thesis borrows from the theorisations of life transitions that highlight

the need to observe non-linearity and 'unexpected' life events. However, it more explicitly adopts a life-course approach as it looks beyond the transition of becoming 'widowed' itself, to the period of widowhood and other periods in the life-course that influence the subsequent experience of widowhood.

Akin to the focus on the identity of 'widowed', existing research is predominantly concerned with the period of 'widowhood' (see for example; Chakravarti, 1995; Datta, 2008; Giri (eds.), 2002; Haase, 2008; Jensen, 2005; Parkes and Prigerson, 2010; Yadav, 2016). Further, explorations of widowhood appear within research on the life-course (see Morgan and Kunkel, 2011; Williams and Umberson, 2004), but explicit life-course approaches to understanding widowhood are underdeveloped. Widowhood is a seminal period in the life-course, but it is not the only period in a woman's life-course worthy of attention. This privileging of the temporal period of 'post-separation' is also echoed within the 'feminisation of poverty' thesis.

However, notable exceptions to this include Chambers (2005 and 2005), Haase (2008) and Martin-Matthews (2011). Within her qualitative research on older widows in Stockport, Chambers (2002: 38) details the importance of a life-course approach in the context of widowhood; a life-course approach afforded an individual "an opportunity to reflect and make sense of her current situation in the light of her whole life". In a later text she (2005: 57) reflect on the perils of not incorporating a life-course approach; "not to do so means we run the risk of interpreting her widowhood in isolation from the rest of her life". In particular, Haase (2008) stresses the significance of questioning women about their marriage, and their relationship with their husband, in order to understand more about their widowhood. This research builds on Haase's (2008) work by illustrating how marriage and other stages within the life-course shape a widow's current situation. In doing so it will deconstruct common narratives within scholarship on

widowhood, and female-headed households, that women are always 'worse off' without their husbands. Consequently this research pays tribute to a woman's diverse history through the theoretical nexus, but also within the consequent methods adopted. In interviews, focus groups and oral histories women's diverse histories were explored, taking the focus away from the period of widowhood. In doing so it builds on scholarly work by Galvin (2005), Lamb (2000) and Wadley (1995) that have also conducted oral histories, and thus have considered the life-course.

This research combines both an intersectional and a life-course approach. It is argued that the integration of these approaches can help in "challenging binaries", uncovering "multiple perspectives, at different levels of scale" and exploring the "nuanced understandings of structures" influencing an issue (Kelly, 2015: 241 and 243). In this way, this work progresses scholarship on widowhood specifically through the integration of these concepts, and adds to the academic work of Hopkins and Pain (2007), Kelly (2015) and Vespa (2009) who explore the advantages of connecting these approaches more generally.

Related to life-course, is time and temporality. At this point it is important to further discuss temporality that is a central theme, like intersectionality, that transcends this thesis. Evidently time is a contentious notion, and as a result is conceptualised in different ways by individuals, and is also significantly shaped according to the socio-cultural context. Therefore, throughout this thesis within all of the empirical chapters the different ways in which time is reflected and understood upon will be detailed. For example, whether participants were referring to real time, age, ageing, age when widowed, length of time widowed, life-stage or generation.

RETHINKING WELL-BEING IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERSECTIONAL WIDOWHOOD

In the context of widowhood much of the existing scholarship has investigated the lives of widows through orthodox approaches centred on poverty. As detailed in *Chapter 1*, the majority of studies have focused on income (Drèze and Srinivasan, 1997; Holden, 1988; Weir and Willis, 2000), mortality rates and health (Chen and Drèze, 1992; Mari Bhat, 1994), and dispossession (Owen, 1996; Young, 2006). These negative doctrines that dominate narratives of widowhood, not only encourage the depiction of widowed women as 'poor', but also overlook the multi-dimensionality of well-being. There is increasing academic consensus that conceptualisations of poverty, derived predominately from income, are, in many ways, redundant and fail to capture the multi-dimensional resources that people need to 'live well' (Deneulin and McGregor, 2010; Rojas, 2006; Sen, 1990). As a result, well-being has been introduced as a progressive and nuanced alternative (Deneulin, and McGregor, 2010; Rojas, 2006; Sen, 1990). Nonetheless, scholarly work on widowhood and well-being still remains sparse.

Defining well-being is problematic as it ultimately means "different things to different people" (White, 2009: 3), a sentiment which other scholars endorse (see Dodge et al, 2012; Thomas, 2009). McGillivray and Clarke (2006: 3) explain that well-being is often used interchangeably with terms such as:

> "Quality of life, welfare, well-living, living standards, utility, life satisfaction, prosperity, needs fulfilment, development, empowerment, capability expansion, human development, poverty, human poverty, land and, more recently, happiness".

This difficulty in defining well-being is largely a consequence of the fact that its evolution has been shaped by multiple and intersecting disciplines. Wright (2012: 17) notes that "human wellbeing theory has

evolved across a range of disciplines, including health research, cross-cultural psychology, the economics of happiness and development studies". This explains why the definition and demarcation of wellbeing is dependent upon the disciplinary approach taken. Furthermore, in this way one could describe well-being as an 'umbrella concept' which connects disparate disciplines.

In order to understand the concept of well-being and its dynamic nature it is important to trace its evolution. For the purpose of this thesis, it is appropriate to explore the particular contributions development scholars such as Doyal and Gough (1991), Helliwell and Putnam (2004), Moser (2005), Nussbaum (2000) and Sen (1985) have made to the evolution of the concept. Within development studies, it can be argued that well-being has largely evolved in response to criticisms of poverty, and its predominant focus on income. White (2016: 8) explains that "Quality of life (QoL) health and social indicators have been gathered since at least the 1960's", yet until recently income-based measurements, such as GDP have largely dominated public policy. As a consequence of the critique of GDP, and its failure to look beyond income and consider other aspects needed to living well, other theorisations were introduced into the development debate. The following table by Sumner (2007: 6) illustrates the prevailing approaches and measurement of poverty since the 1960's.

Period	**Concept of Poverty**	**Measurement of Poverty**
1960	Economic	GDP per capita growth
1970	Basic needs (inc. economic)	GDP per capita growth + basic goods
1980	Economic	GDP per capita
1990	Human development (inc. economic)	UNDP Human Development Indices
2000	Multi-dimensional 'freedom'	Millennium Development Goals

The shift from income-based conceptualisations associated with poverty to more multi-dimensional conceptions associated with well-being can be largely attributed to Amartya Sen's (1985) capability approach. His theorisation has arguably the most fundamental theoretical influence in rooting well-being in the global development agenda. Critically the capability approach encompasses the notions of 'functionings' and 'capabilities'. In turn, Deneulin and McGregor (2010: 503 and 504) contend that functionings are the "valuable activities and states that become a person's well-being – such as a healthy body, being safe, being educated, having a good job, being able to move and visit people", while capabilities refer to "the freedoms one has to do these valuable activities or reach these valuable states". Sen's (1985) theorisation indicates that there is a need to consider the multiple conditions of living well and an individual's capacity and ability to achieve those conditions.

On the basis of Sen's (1985) seminal work, Nussbaum (2000) further developed the 'capabilities approach', and subsequently contributed to current understandings of well-being. Her work is centred on human functioning and human dignity, whereas Sen's work is more concerned with enhancing individual freedom. Unlike Sen, who does not give a list of the universal capabilities needed, Nussbaum (2000) argues that there are ten core capabilities that should be universally upheld by all democracies. She (2003: 40) adds "a society that does not guarantee these to all its citizens, at some appropriate threshold level, falls short of being a fully just society, whatever its level of opulence". She states that these ten capabilities include: Life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play and control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2003). As evident from this list, Nussbaum's theory (2003) diverges from Sen's (1985) theorisation, especially with reference to its emphasis on the importance of non-economic aspects of life, including emotions, affiliation and play.

Critically Nussbaum (2003) recognises that well-being encompasses core, universally agreed material needs and the subjective differences between people's understandings of well-being. This illustrates the broader understanding amongst proponents of well-being that it should encompass both objective and subjective dimensions. White (2016: 6) importantly highlights the distinction between them:

> "Objective dimensions of wellbeing are those that in principle can be verified by an external observer. Quality of housing, level of education or income would be examples. Subjective dimensions of wellbeing are those that are interior to the person him or herself- thoughts and feelings- where in principle the individual is the ultimate authority"

Thus in this way well-being incorporates material dimensions and economic aspects, but also goes beyond this to incorporate emotional and psychosocial states.

Caroline Moser's work on livelihoods has also contributed to current understandings of well-being. Akin to the capabilities approach, Moser's (2005: 2) theory on sustainable livelihoods (SL) argues for attention to capabilities:

> "The concept of sustainable livelihoods (SL), while linked to issues of social protection, alters the focus from income and consumption to directly address the critical role that assets and capabilities play in improving individual and household social and economic well-being"

Moser (2005: 10) adds that a livelihood is sustainable when it can "cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base". Moser's theory is significant as it argues for the need to consider income, but to also look beyond it to examine how a person's capabilities shape their well-being. A livelihood approach takes a "multidisciplinary view of poverty", seeing it as not just an economic problem but acknowledging the "political, cultural, social and ecological aspects as well" (Zoomers, 2014: 231). Such a

perspective deviates away from what people lack, and focuses on the active role people have in supporting themselves. Evidently such a focus inherently speaks more to a person's agency. So as it will be discussed further, like the sustainable livelihoods and the capabilities approach, well-being is implicitly more concerned with a person's agency.

Akin to Nussbaum (2003), Doyal and Gough (1991) have contributed to the evolution of well-being and developed theory around universal human needs. In their seminal text 'A Theory of Human Need' (1991), they outline two fundamental and universal needs; these include physical health and personal autonomy. By physical health this means that people have the provision of food, health, shelter and safety. Personal autonomy is concerned with the capacity to make informed choice; the way in which autonomy connects with agency will be discussed further in subsequent sections. The ability to make such choices requires sound mental health, cognitive skills, and opportunities to participate in society's activities and collective decision-making.

Doyal and Gough (1991) contend that there are both universal objective needs, and more localised subjective needs. They (1991: 155) argue that:

> "While the basic individual needs for physical health and autonomy are universal, most goods and services required to satisfy these needs are culturally variable. For example, the needs for food and shelter apply to all peoples, but there is a large variety of cuisines and forms of dwelling which can meet any given specification of nutrition and protection from the elements".

These spatial, cultural and historical differences situate the need for what they (1991) call 'intermediate needs'. The universal needs of health and autonomy are supported by a variety of intermediate needs that are more subjective and that vary according to context. These

intermediate needs typically include: nutritional food and clean water; protective housing; a non-hazardous work environment; a non-hazardous physical environment; appropriate health care; a secure childhood; significant primary relationships; physical security; economic security; appropriate education; safe birth control and child-bearing (ibid.). With respect to their theory, Doyal and Gough (ibid.) argue that there are 'objective' and universal needs, which include physical health and autonomy, but that the means by which they are achieved, through intermediate needs, are subjective and locally dependent.

Related to Doyal and Gough's (1991) work is Ryan and Deci's (2001) psychology based research on Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This theory suggests that autonomy, competency and relatedness are the key integral components of well-being[15]. They stress that a person can achieve well-being when these three needs are satisfied. Ryan and Deci's (2001) theory is significant given the central interest of relatedness and relationships to this work. Further scholarly work by Ryff and Singer (2008) include positive relationships with other people as one of their core domains of well-being.

Given its prevalence in shaping well-being, 'relational well-being' has in fact emerged as an autonomous concept in itself. Relational well-being is understood as something which is "not the property of individuals but as something that belongs to and emerges through relationships" (White, 2016: 29). Thus relational well-being occupies the space between individuals rather than belonging to an individual itself. The focus on relationships does not mean to say well-being does not consider material and subjective dimensions; instead "in relational wellbeing, material, relational and subjective dimensions are seen as

[15] Ryan and Deci (2001: 141) argue that well-being has development from two psychological perspectives: "the hedonic approach, which focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance; and the eudemonic approach, which focuses on meaning and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning"

mutually imbricated and co-constituting" (White, 2016: 30). The roots of relational well-being are connected to the fact that well-being is constructed by particular places and spaces and by time. In this way it diverges from a universalist approach, as it argues that understandings of well-being are also geographically embedded. This thesis adopts these qualities of relational well-being and applies it to this work.

Further to this, relationships in the context of well-being are particularly important within Asian cultures. As Brickell and Chant (2010: 149) argue:

> 'Asian values' typically "reflect societal interests over narrow, individual self-interest, order and harmony over personal freedom, and the valuing of respect for strong leadership with sustained attachment to family and conventional patterns of authority and loyalty"[16].

In their work on well-being in India, Jha and White (2016) illustrate the importance of relationships to people's well-being and to women's well-being particularly. Importantly, they (ibid.: 165) highlight why women's well-being may be more acutely centred around the family:

> "the particularly privileged place of the family in South Asian society gives people – and especially women – a strong incentive to preserve the ideology of the 'happy family' and to represent their behaviour and experience in terms that conform to this ideal."

Given their importance to women's well-being, especially within South Asia, relationships and relatedness are an intrinsic part of well-being theory.

Connected to relationships and relational well-being is the importance of social capital. Helliwell and Putnams' research (2004) discovered

[16] Although they do not necessarily endorse these as always working for the benefit of women.

that well-being was more often supported, not by income but, by social capital. They stress (2004: 1444):

> "The impact of society-wide increases in affluence on subjective well-being is uncertain and modest at best, whereas the impact of society-wide increases in social capital on well-being would be unambiguously and strongly positive"

This suggests that people were happier when their social capital was higher. This somewhat links to the 'Easterlin Paradox' that argues that successive generations, who are richer than their parents, are no happier with their lives (White, 2016; Wright, 2012). This suggests that income shapes well-being up to point, but that it cannot solely explain differences in happiness. Such findings have subsequently supported the development of the 'economics of happiness'.

It is clear that scholarly work by Doyal and Gough (1991), Helliwell and Putnam (2004), Nussbaum (2003) and Sen (1985) have contributed to the evolution of well-being. Their contributions are seminal firstly because of the their consideration of both objective and subjective dimensions, and secondly because of their attention to the way in which well-being is culturally and historically shaped. While other theories like Quality of Life (QoL), happiness, life satisfaction are closely related to well-being it is important to make a distinction between them.

QoL was developed by "health scientists and psychologists to track people's perceptions of their health status" (Wright, 2012: 11). While it is has contributed to well-being and is an important concept, QoL theories focus more on the objective aspects of well-being and are historically more rooted in quantitative based measurements. Notably more subjective understandings of well-being have been developed within cross-cultural psychology[17]. Diener (2006: 401) highlights the distinction between QoL and subjective well-being:

[17] Typically within psychology subjective well-being is said to have two parts; positive affect (e.g. joy) and life satisfaction (cognitive) to do with how people appraise their life as a whole.

> "In contrast to subjective well-being, which is based on subjective experience, quality of life is often expressed as more 'objective' and describes the circumstances of a person's life rather than his or her reaction to those circumstances"

Life satisfaction, although linked with well-being, is distinct. Wright notes how "'life satisfaction' relates to how respondents report on, evaluate or appraise their life as a whole". For Diener (2006: 153) well-being includes components like "life satisfaction and work satisfaction, interest and engagement, and affective reactions to life events, such as joy and sadness". In this way well-being is "an umbrella term for the different valuations people make regarding their lives, the events happening to them, their bodies and minds, and the circumstances in which they live" (Diener, 2006: 400).

White (2016: 5) highlights the distinction between happiness, or the 'economics of happiness', and well-being:

> "Across the literature as a whole, happiness generally appears as a narrow concept, a component of wellbeing sometimes identified with 'subjective wellbeing' (SWB)".

She further explains that happiness tends to be more connected to an individuals emotions and feelings, where well-being, which also considers emotions and feelings, also takes into account more 'objective' dimensions, such as health care, education and housing. It seems the main distinction between QoL, happiness and life satisfaction is that well-being is a broader concept which considers each of these, and which also considers both subjective and objective elements.

Now that the evolution of well-being has been traced the theories that have contributed to its development have been outlined, it is important first posit an appropriate definition of well-being that this research endorses and second to highlight the advantages of deploying this framework. Given the varying roots of well-being and the multiple

disciplines in which it circulates, for this particular thesis the following definition from Gough et al. (2007: 34) is most appropriate:

> "A state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals and where one enjoys satisfactory quality of life".

Foremost among its strengths is the fact that a well-being approach better accounts for the multiplicity of people's lives and what it means to 'live well'. Highlighting the tendency for studies that use the concept of poverty to "ignore non-monetary resources", Chant (2007: 62) explains how well-being can account for the "wholeness and complexity of human beings". Feminist contributions illustrate that women's lives do not merely revolve around income, or a lack of it. As such, well-being is appropriate for heuristic inquiry into the nuances of their lives, and a more explicit concern for embedded experiences (Chant, 2007). In this respect, White (2010: 160) contends that one of the key promises of well-being is "that it is centred in the person and his/her own priorities and perspectives".

Furthermore, a more explicit focus on subjectivity also encourages place-based considerations where perceptions of well-being are grounded within specific socio-cultural contexts, circumventing Eurocentric assumptions (Deneulin and McGregor, 2010). Furthermore, consideration of the more non-economic aspects of well-being is particularly important for gendered research, as it prohibits a household's experience being ascribed to individual women living within that household. Critiquing the tendency of scholarship on poverty to focus on household income, as opposed to individual well-being, Gita Sen (2010) emphasises the need to turn our attention from households to individuals. A seemingly stable income, resources and the pretense of peaceful living can often camouflage the reality for women living within a household.

By considering the more subjective dimensions of well-being an individuals voice, needs and opinions can be privileged, thus accounting for their agential capacity. In their scholarly work concerned with the intergenerational transmission of poverty, Sumner et al. (2009: 23) note:

> "Wellbeing extends attention from what people can do and be to how people feel about what they can do and be. Wellbeing is thus explicitly rather than inferentially about agency".

Furthermore, the positive connotations associated with well-being are inherently more empowering than the associations with deprivation linked with poverty. Within her work on the well-being of Peruvian migrants in London, Wright (2011b: 1460) highlights these benefits of well-being:

> "One advantage of using a human wellbeing lens over other kinds of poverty or social exclusion lenses is that it is premised on the agency of the poor, rather than seeing them as passive victims of structures beyond their control."

In this vein, refraining from ascribing individuals as 'poor' gives them the space and agential capacity to improve their lives. In connection to this, poverty and poverty lines in particular, imply two simplistic states of either being poor or not, while well-being is more processual and fluid, challenging the binary of poor/non-poor (White, 2009). Conceptualisations of well-being can account for that fact that a person may be living well in some aspects of their life but not in others, and that these experiences are dynamic and ever-changing. As Gough et al. (2007: 5) contend:

> "States of wellbeing/illbeing are continually produced in the interplay within the social, political, economic and cultural processes of human social being. It cannot be conceived just as an outcome, but must be understood also as a process."

Wright's (2011b: 1471) further demonstrates this through her research on Peruvian migrants: although "migrants often perceived themselves to be materially richer in London than in Peru, they experience a sense of 'feeling poor' - experienced as isolation and loneliness as well as emptiness and spiritual alienation." Such perspectives evidences that well-being is a *complex process* rather than an *enduring state* as implied in approaches to poverty (White, 2010; Jha and White, 2016). Furthermore, the fluidity and processual nature of well-being can account for the fact that a seemingly 'positive' contribution can also be, in other ways, negatively affecting well-being and vice versa. Through her example about volunteering at a homeless shelter, Alkire (2009: 5) explains how this work "may advance his or her agency goals" and therefore some aspects of subjective and emotional well-being, but "simultaneously result in tiredness and anxiety which decrease well-being". Therefore well-being outcomes are multiple and not necessarily congruent. The static characteristics and the binary nature of poverty make it difficult to account for such complexities.

Whilst approaches to understanding well-being can account for individual experiences, well-being can also perhaps offer more relational and collective understandings of what it means to live well. White (2010: 14) suggests how "the proper 'home' of wellbeing may be more properly identified at the community level than at the individual level". This is particularly important since relationships and personal connections are endemic to well-being within Asian cultures (see also above).

In contrast to well-being, understandings of poverty are historically "Anglo-Saxon" and "individualistic" in nature (de Haan, 1998: 13 and 14). White (2009) supports this perspective within her research piloting an approach to well-being in Zambia. She (ibid.: 8) maintains that Western ideologies of the person tend to "be highly individualistic, way out of line with the more collective orientation of most other

cultural contexts". Thus, well-being better accounts for collective understandings of living well. Although this may seem to contradict the previous argument, theorisations of well-being can still account for individual differences whilst also considering the importance of relationships and the broader community in contributing to an individuals conceptions of well-being. This further supports White (2010: 14) claim that well-being may be more "properly identified at the community than at the individual level" (ibid.: 14).

While a well-being approach contributes positively to, and advances, research on widowhood in the ways discussed above, there are limitations. The ways in which well-being can account for the multiplicity of people's lives and the multiple experiences of living well are important contributions, however this expansiveness can make it difficult for scholars to agree on a definition (White, 2009). Further to this, as it will be discussed in *Chapter 3*, in some countries there is no direct translation for the term well-being.

Although the positive characteristics of well-being, and the consequent acknowledgement of agential capacity, are important contributions, the "development community may be uncomfortable talking about 'positives' as it might seem to make light of deprivation" (Jones and Sumner, 2011: 15 and 16). This could make development interventions redundant, which is obviously not the desired intention. Furthermore, persistent inequalities - and the structures and powers - that perpetuate them can be elided. Therefore, well-being must be used in such a way that it does not undermine the difficult realities of people's lives, and the functions and structures that create them.

Connected to this, is the criticism that Sen's understandings of 'living well' do not sufficiently consider the structures and institutions that allow people to pursue freedom in relation to others, nor do they currently take sufficient "account of the social, and therefore political,

nature of human wellbeing" (Deneulin and McGregor, 2010: 502). In their critique of Sen's theorisations, Deneulin and McGregor (ibid.) maintain that his approach needs to expand to encompass understandings of "living well together" and that a social conceptualisation of well-being must be implemented to evade 'false consciousness'. False consciousness has parallels with the issue of internalisation when women, "as members of a low status social group", learn to "internalise the negativity surrounding the social construction of femaleness" (Morley, 1992: 519). Although subjective accounts of well-being are important, it is also vital to incorporate a social conception of well-being in order to account for internalisation and false consciousness.

Although there has been significant focus on how perceptions of well-being vary according to individuals, space and time (see Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1993; Diener et al. (eds.), 2010; Copestake and Camfield, 2009; White, 2009 and 2010; White et al., 2014), little attention has been paid to how perceptions of well-being may vary according to '*intersectional*' identities. Furthermore, within the limited scholarship that has explored intersectionality and well-being, this has been predominantly centred on the social and psychological well-being. Within their studies on lesbian, gay and bisexual groups and African American and Caribbean youth, Kertzner et al. (2009) and Seaton et al. (2010) explore intersectional identities in the context of social and psychological well-being. Other research has investigated intersectionality in association with physiological well-being (Schulz and Mullings, 2006). Therefore, an intersectional approach has not yet been applied to research that incorporates the 'multidimensional' aspects of well-being. Thus, this thesis makes a vital conceptual contribution to gender and development studies, as by locating perceptions of well-being within multiple social identities, such perceptions can be better understood and further contextualised.

In addition to an intersectional approach, this research argues for the incorporation of a temporal perspective to well-being. While there have been several studies that assess well-being over the life-course (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2008; Kamp-Dush et al., 2008; Larkin, 2013), research that has adopted a more explicit temporal perspective is predominantly limited to White (2009 and 2010) and Wright (2011a). Wright (ibid.: 140) maintains:

> "The construction of human well-being varies according to age and across the life course. For example, what babies need to "live well" will be different from the needs of widows".

Drawing from her research with the WED group, White further (2010: 165 and 166) illustrates:

> "People's ideas of their own wellbeing - and their estimations of whether they have or will achieve(d) it - also change through the life-cycle. Expectations of the future and reflections on the past also have a bearing on how people conceive of their present - and how people feel about their present *affects how they read their pasts and future."*

Given the importance of past experiences in the life-course in shaping widowhood, it is therefore vital to integrate temporality into theorisations of well-being.

Considering these general critiques it is important to explore the more specific conceptualisations associated with this particular thesis and detail how it adopts them. This thesis uses the WED framework based on the interlocking dimensions of material, subjective and relational well-being, and seeks to implement particular aspects of it, specifically with reference to subjective well-being.

Subjective well-being is used within the WED framework and is described as the "cultural values, ideologies and beliefs and also people's own perceptions of their situation". Wright (2011a: 152) uses the term perceptual rather than subjective well-being "to avoid the potential confusion associated with the particular branch of literature within human well-being approaches known as 'subjective well-being approaches'". This is evidently important in avoiding ambiguity. Perceptual well-being is used within the work of Wright (2011b: 1462) and is described as the "values, perceptions and experience relating to how people think and feel about what they can do and be." In this way it seems relatively congruous to subjective well-being. In another publication Wright (2011a: 142) gives this explanation of perceptual well-being:

> "The perceptual dimension includes aspects such as understandings of the sacred and the moral order; self-concept and personality; hopes, fears, and aspirations; sense of meaning/meaninglessness; and levels of (dis)satisfaction, trust and confidence".

It is this particular understanding and approach to perceptual well-being that this research adopts. The former understanding of perceptual well-being outlined, like subjective well-being, is still more concerned with how an individual perceives and conceptualises their well-being rather than the more emotional aspects of it. Undoubtedly subjective understandings and conceptions of well-being are critical, but what 'people think and feel about their well-being' are also important with respect to aspects of material and relational well-being, like employment and friendship. Thus, for the purpose of this research, Wrights (2011b) latter definition of perceptual well-being is adopted.

In response to their own critiques of subjective well-being, the WED group subsequently developed the term 'inner well-being' (IWB) which is comprised of seven dimensions including "economic confidence; agency and participation; social connections; close relationships;

physical and mental health; competence and self-worth; values and meaning" (White et al., 2014: 727) However, having seven dimensions could force scholars into overly categorising, and in doing so the fluidity and interconnectivity within and between domains of well-being can be lost. Consequently this research rejects the IWB framework and adopts the earlier framework used by WED (see White, 2009 and 2010) based on relational, material, and in the case of this thesis, perceptual well-being.

AGENCY BEYOND RESISTANCE: AN AGENTIAL CONTINUUM

In the past two decades the importance of acknowledging women's empowerment and agency, especially in the Global South, has been increasingly advocated by feminist scholars such as Abu-Lughod (1990), Kabeer (1999), Mohanty (1988) and Spivak (1988). However, discussions around agency have been only sparsely incorporated in academic work on widowhood; much existing scholarship has focused primarily on vulnerability, fundamentally neglecting the agential capacity of widowed women (see *Chapter 1*).

Agency is an expansive topic and given the focus of this research *gendered* agency is particularly important. Further to this, restrictions and expectations associated with widowhood in Nepal are framed around wider gendered norms and cultural practices, so, it is within this rubric that agency is explored. Factors that are integral to understanding agency in the context of gendered cultural practices, including identity construction, socio-cultural differences, the reproduction of norms and intersectionality will be discussed. Finally, the limitations of agency will be addressed.

Definitions of agency differ between and within academic disciplines. Sharp (1999: 3) defines it as "volition, free will and moral choice on the part of the individual" involving the "power of actors to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure". Further definitions of agency from Muñoz Boudet et al. (2013:13) attest that agency is the:

> "Subjective capacity for choice and also the capacity for self-determination, where women – and men – get to play an active role in the formation of their identity and do not passively absorb external determinations or constraints"

Feminist academics have been influential in theorising agency. They have been particularly critical in deconstructing the narrative of the 'romance of resistance' (Abu-Lughod, 1990) and forming more progressive approaches to better understand the subtlety and complexity of women's agential iterations. Orthodox conceptualisations of agency tend to romanticise all forms of agency as resistance *against* patriarchal powers (Ong, 1987; Riessman, 2000). Indeed, Abu-Lughod (1990: 42) admits to her own previous "tendency to romanticize resistance". However, feminist contributions highlight that agency perceived in this way only partially reveals the intricacy of power relations (see Abu-Lughod, 1990; Butler, 2009; Katz, 2004; Mahmood, 2001 and 2005). In parallel with this notion of the 'romance of resistance', traditional approaches to understanding women's agency have uniformly championed women's empowerment. However Jha and White (2016: 144) contend, "against expectations in the empowerment literature that women's agency is something to celebrate, Mangali posed her responsibility as burdensome and counter to her desires". Thus, in this way women's empowerment is not always favourable.

Equating agency with resistance, and interpreting agency as uniformly positive, implies a resistance/domination binary, discounting the possibility that women may actively choose to conform to gendered norms and expectations in certain contexts, and that increased agency

may not always support their well-being (see Jha and White, 2016; Katz, 2004; Lamb, 2000; Mahmood, 2005; Williams et al., 2011). Such understandings of agency equating resistance are inherently dominated by western presumptions about women in the Global South. The pervasiveness of the 'romance of resistance' paradigm has meant that research concerned with conforming to, and complying with, gendered norms has been limited. Furthermore, while recognising why women resist gendered cultural practices is relatively straightforward, understanding *how* and *why* women conform, or partially conform, requires a more nuanced perspective as demonstrated by feminists.

By deconstructing this notion of agency as resistance, scholars such as Butler (2009), Katz (2004) and Mahmood (2005) have explored the ways in which agency can also involve the observance of norms. In so doing, they further illustrate the extent to which norms are ubiquitous. Although referring to performativity rather than agency, Butler's theorisation is particularly seminal given the parallels between both concepts. In her work on performativity, precarity and sexual politics, Butler (2009) illustrates how gender is 'performative' as it requires a certain kind of enactment in order to be reproduced. Within this rubric, Butler (2009: xi) stresses how norms are ubiquitous; even before an action, norms act upon us, thus "when we do act, we recapitulate the norms that act upon us, perhaps in new or unexpected ways, but still in relation to norms that precede us and exceed us". Thus agency, even when deemed to be oppositional, is never so as it is always enacted with reference to the norm that it attempts to transgress and rework. Agency understood in this way helps to reveal how an agential iteration can be *concurrently* resisting and conforming.

Such a perspective stresses the need to understand agential iterations *within* the broader context of power structures and norms, rather than peripheral to them (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Butler, 2009; Williams et al., 2011). Working on women's mosque movements in Egypt, Mahmood's

(2005) research helps to illustrate this. She contends that even while women's use of mosques to deliver teaching altered male-dominant traditions, the public arena in which they were orchestrated was still structured and upheld by patriarchy. These contributions demonstrate the paradoxical nature of agency and the fact that it is never isolated or independent from power structures, norms and the expectations associated with them.

With the paradoxical nature of agency in mind, practices that may appear to be restricting a woman's agential action, and indeed seem to be perpetuating gender inequality, can be enacted in return for other current or forthcoming agential pursuits. Contributions from feminists help to explain how women may conform to gendered norms to secure agency for another purpose. Avishai (2008: 411) argues, "religious women strategize and appropriate religion to further extra-religious ends such as economic opportunities, domestic relations, political ideologies, and cultural affiliation". Further exemplifying this Muñoz Boudet et al. (2013: 120) suggest how women's decision to wear a veil may not necessarily be a "progressive choice", but it can affect "their ability to earn" as adorning the veil can make it easier and safer for women to work and engage in public spaces. In the context of this thesis, widowed women's constructions of their identities as 'devoted wives and widows' who comply with gendered norms, may enable them to gain agency in another capacity or to secure it for the future (see Lamb, 2000; Ramnarain, 2014). This reiterates the salience of exploring agential action beyond mere acts of 'resistance'.

By deconstructing the orthodoxy that equates resistance with agency, feminist scholars have also emphasised how enactments of agency can be for the purpose of conserving tradition, pious practices and modesty itself. In her study on the veil, Mahmood (2001: 209) argues that while feminist academics have explored several reasons for women's desire to conform to these adornment practices, the motivation to maintain

the norm of "female modesty or piety" has been entirely overlooked as a possibility. A comparable example within this research could be the wearing of dull colours by widowed women, which is perceived as a form of modesty, religious piety and respect to their deceased husbands and wider religion. Such possibilities are legitimate forms of agency, but seem to have been widely overlooked.

Given that women conform to norms to maintain their piety, it is important to further position understandings of agency in the context of the eschatological beliefs of fate and karma present within the Hindu faith (see *Chapter 6)*. Fate and karma are implicit to research with a South Asian focus, and have a consequent influence on agency. Although commonly interrelated they are, however, distinct. For Hindu's fate is inscribed by the God Brahma on the forehead of a child upon their birth whereas, karma is the "force behind samsara, the transmigration of souls in a cycle of death and rebirth" (Bauer, 2003: 323). Hindus believe that while upon reincarnation a person cannot bring anything material into their new life, they can bring an accumulation of deeds or work *(karma)* [18] from their past life. The notions of fate and karma are implicit to the circular notion of time within the Asian cultures, differentiating from the more linear approach in 'Western' cultures (Helman, 2005; see above also). This reiterates the importance of understanding how time is conceptualised in different contexts.

Widows, in particular, may have a more acute belief in fate since it is believed their husband's death is attributable to their own fate (Wadley, 1995). The ideology of fate may deter widows from acting as creative agents, since they believe their life may already be determined regardless of their active input. The ideology of karma may further encourage them not to be active agents, as women may not want to resist gendered norms since this might determine their future

[18] Karma in Sanskrit is synonymous with words such as "activity, action, work" and "duty" (Sathyasai- Sanskrit Dictionary, 2016).

happiness in this life, and in their next life upon reincarnation. However, some may believe that opposing norms in the hope of achieving greater gender equality will generate positive karma.

Scholarship that explores how these wider theological and fatalistic attitudes shape a person's agential action are limited to Mahmood (2005). Through the narratives of two women, Mahmood (2005: 173) illustrates how the same enactment of agency can be "bounded by both an eschatological structure and a social one", neither of which has more value than the other. Therefore, this research builds on Mahmood's (2005) analysis and importantly contributes to studies on gendered agency through its consideration of fate and karma.

With respect to this discussion on fate and karma within Hindu cultures, feminists have also been fundamental in highlighting the variability of agency across cultures, and in deconstructing Western understandings of agency. Criticising 'Western' and neo-liberal notions of agency that are primarily concerned with independence and individualism, Wray (2004: 23) contends that, "it is possible to be dependent without this posing a threat to autonomous or independent action and to be empowered and disempowered at the same time". Furthermore, in her work on widowhood Ramnarain (2014: 1) argues that while policies related to gender empowerment have often assumed women to be "individualized receptacles", women's agency is actually significantly influenced by relationships and socio-cultural settings. Such contributions position the need for a *relational* agency that "constructs women not as separate from other persons or conditions of survival, but sees them as part of the context of their day-to-day dealings" (Willemse, 2007: 132). As discussed in the previous section, relationships are integral to Asian cultures and women's altruistic behaviour; consequently more relational and collective approaches to understanding agency seem more appropriate.

Related to the Western dominated obsession with individualism within constructions of agency is the equation between voice and agency. Debating the premise that women are only empowered agents if they are audible Parpart (2010: 15) argues:

> "Voice, or the act of speaking out, is often identified in the gender and development literature, and much of the feminist literature, as one of the key conditions demonstrating women's empowerment.'"

Parpart (ibid.) further illustrates how silent forms of agency have been ignored, and are perceived as being passive. Yet, importantly silence can also allow time and space for questioning norms, developing strategies and collating resources. Gal (1991) and Mahoney (1996) stress the need to pay attention to seemingly 'quiet' forms of agential action. Drawing on the sociolinguistic studies of everyday talk, Gal (1991) explores the different constructions and meanings behind silence and how they vary culturally. Within her work on feminist psychology, Mahoney (1996: 603) explains how silence is "complex and multidimensional" and critiques the equation between voice and agency.

Acknowledging silent forms of power is part of the wider effort by feminists to draw increasing attention to embedded and 'everyday' forms of agential action (Parpart, 2010). Normative understandings of power overlook the significance of the more nuanced ways in which power and agency are enacted (Nightingale, 2011). Desai (2002: 222) attests:

> "Subtle strategies can make practical improvements to women's lives…. while their attempts may not seem particularly innovative or effective to outsiders, to the women involved, the resulting changes are significant"

Ramnarain (2014: 13) further comments, "women's small, everyday triumphs" can transform into "larger empowerment gains" which in turn "pave the path for a nuanced articulation of gender equality".

Attention paid to the 'everyday' and less radicalised actions is also implicit in understanding the intricate workings of power (see Abu-Lughod, 1990; Datta, 2008). Similarly, attention to intersectional identities is fundamental in uncovering the complexity of agency and power relations. Ramnarain (2014: 10) details "homogenizing accounts of widowhood obscure the spaces carved out for action by widows in their everyday lives". In order to understand agential acts, and the motivations behind them, there needs to be consideration of pre-existing intersectional identities.

Throughout this section contributions by feminist theorists with regard to women's agency have been referenced. Although these gendered contributions are seminal, it is important to specifically illustrate how this research serves to progress them and to delineate the theoretical framework adopted. Lamb (2000) and Nightingale's (2011) scholarly work focuses on power, Kabeer's (1999) research is concerned with empowerment and Butler's (2009) is based on performativity rather than agency. Highlighting the multilateral nature of agency, Cindy Katz (2004) conceptualises agency in terms of five actions, which include resistance, reworking, resilience, revanchism and revolution. However, the 're' within all these actions implies reaction and retaliation, and fails to account for agential actions that involve conforming. Therefore, the closest theoretical contribution to this is Mahmood's (2005) work that explicitly explores agency and the ways in which agential action can involve conforming and resisting.

Understanding how women assert agency is important but it is also vital to position agential action within the life-course and in the context of time. This also feeds into the previous discussion about fate and karma. Women act on the basis of experiences and information from past life experiences and future expectations, and therefore agency is iterated with reference to past and future context, and is never an isolated and timeless action. The conceptualisations of agency

discussed in this chapter consider temporality in a limited and narrow manner. Contributions that, in some way, involve a temporal approach to agency include Kandiyoti's (1988: 275) work on 'patriarchal bargains' whereby "patriarchal bargains are not timeless or immutable entities, but are susceptible to historical transformations that open up new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations between genders". Her work explains how women may tolerate negative treatment at one point in time to secure more autonomy in the future. However, her concept of 'patriarchal bargains' is not explicitly synonymous with agency, the term bargain implies that women always strategise, but agential action is not always strategic or oppositional. Given the considered of eschatological beliefs in shaping agency, Mahmood (2005) does somewhat consider a temporal aspect.

Given these previous discussions, this research builds on Mahmood's (2005) work by proposing an agential continuum. Such a framework is necessary given the entangled nature of agential actions and the fact that an action can be concurrently conforming and resisting. Ultimately acts of agency need to be understood within the context of the past and future, therefore the continuum format accounts for varying range, simultaneity and temporality. This conceptualisation will work on the premise that women's agency can move along the continuum at different times, reflecting its dynamic and changing nature. Agency has been considered in the context of an agency-structure (Giddens, 1984) continuum within sociology, such approaches position agents at the micro level and structure at the macro level (Ritzer, 2015). Such a continuum explains how individuals create social realities that then become hegemonic social structures at the macro level, but it does not consider the fact that agents can reproduce social structures, but simultaneously resist and rework them.

This section has detailed the importance of exploring women's agency and how contributions from feminist scholars have illustrated the

appropriate ways in which women's agency should be examined. Given the increasing attention paid to women's agency it surprising that this has only partially filtered through to studies on widowhood. As outlined, widows have also been commonly perceived as vulnerable. In their research in Nepal, Uprety and Adhikary (2009: 253) fundamentally ignore agency by asserting that widows "are not aware of their rights and inferior status". Ramnarain (2016: 1 and 2) further explains this: "few economic studies focus exclusively on widow headship, on gender norms impinging upon the entitlements and vulnerabilities of widow heads, or on their agency (or lack thereof)". Furthermore, much of the limited scholarship associated with widows' agency is primarily concerned with *resilience* rather than *agency* per se. For example, within the Global North and Global South, Bennett (2010), Bonanno et al. (2004), Korang–Okrah (2011 and 2015), Lenette (2013) and Martin-Matthews (2011) investigate widowhood in the context of resilience. The ways widowed Nepali women use residence, rituals and religion to purse strategies for survival are explored by Galvin (2005). Yet, her focus is formed around 'strategies', and agential action is not always strategic as it can equally be involuntary and unplanned. In addition, her study explores strategies for 'survival' and not in the context of gendered cultural practices.

However, there are some important contributions that have catalysed scholarly attention to widows' agency, debunking representations of widows as vulnerable and helpless victims (see Datta, 2008; Lamb, 2000; Ramnarain 2014 and 2016; Yadav, 2016). The multi-scalar and multi-local assertions of agency are articulated by Datta (2008), while the contradictory nature of agency and the ways in which it can simultaneously involve resisting and conforming are illustrated by both Lamb (2000) and Ramnarain (2014 and 2016). Ramnarain (2014) details how women can reject the identity of 'widowed', thus challenge norms associated with widowhood, but can simultaneously position their identity as 'mothers' and conform to patriarchal gendered norms and expectations. Related to this, both Datta (2008) and Ramnarain

(2014) illustrate how there can be diverging interpretations and outcomes of agency shaped by intersecting identities. Practices of embodied agency are further discussed by Lamb (2000) and Yadav (2016); their focus is particularly seminal since many of the expectations associated with widowhood in Nepal are concerned with adornment. Lamb (2000) stresses how widowed women may embody subtle marks of resistance, but simultaneously, in other forms of adornment, create the identity of 'devoted wives', reinforcing patriarchal norms. On her study on widowhood in Nepal, Yadav's (2016) research explores the ways in which women transform restrictions associated with widowhood through their collective agency.

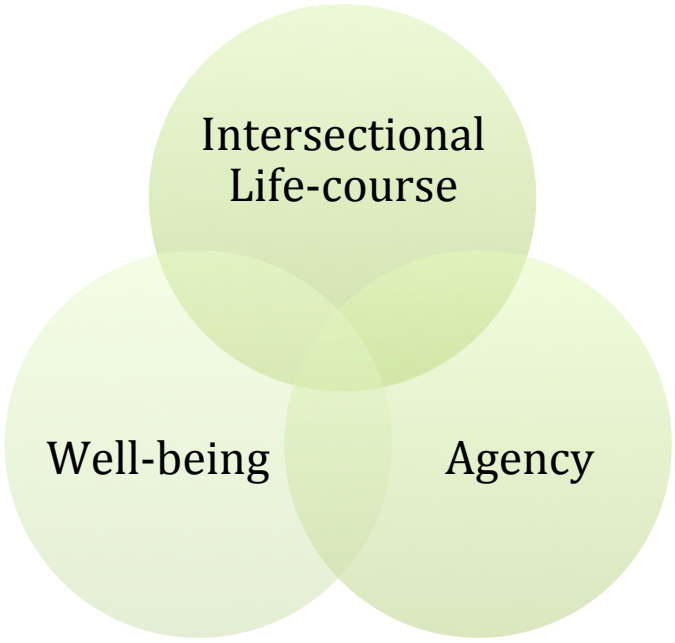
These scholarly works have importantly started to catalyse attention to the agency of widowed women, however none of these contributions elaborate on how they specifically theorise agency. Notably Lamb's (2000) research is more explicitly focused around power rather than agency; Datta (2008) focuses primarily on 'social agency' and Ramnarain (2014 and 2016) largely explores agency in the primarily in the context of economic pursuits. Yet agency can also be enacted in multiple ways for other cultural, religious, social, emotional and eschatological gains. Therefore, this research sits within and expands on this body of work through its continuum approach.

THE NEXUS: INTERSECTIONALITY, WELL-BEING AND AGENCY

The concepts of intersectionality, life-course, well-being and agency have been discussed at length, as have the varied ways in which they support this work. At this point it is then important to explore the ways in which these concepts are interrelated. In addition to this, the way in which they mutually reinforce one another and combine to be greater than the sum of their parts will be illustrated.

This research sees an intersectional life-course approach, well-being and agency as a nexus where the concepts overlap and support each other (see *Figure 2.1* below). It does not consider one concept as overarching and the others as secondary, but all as equally significant. The following section will explain how they are interlinked and how they corroborate each other.

Figure 2.1: The conceptual nexus



Each of these concepts influences the other two; for instance, intersectional identities and experiences in the life-course support or impede well-being, and can also influence the ways in which agency is enacted. As Wright (2016: 285) maintains:

> "Human well-being approaches incorporate racial, ethnic, age, class and gender differences, as they are premised on the understanding that constructions of what is needed to 'live well' are affected, for example, by age and gender and that these constructions will also vary across the life course"

Likewise, changes to well-being can reinforce the ways in which identities can be considered as privileges or modes of marginalisation; for example, a decrease in income can exacerbate the marginalisation of a 'lower' caste person. Like intersectionality, stages in the life-course and past life experiences shape conceptions of well-being. In the context of this research, widowhood, a stage in a woman's life-course, ultimately has an effect on her well-being. Conversely, the current state of a person's well-being can shape the way in which they perceive their current life-stage or age. As it will be detailed, periods in a woman's life-course can impede or encourage her ability to enact agency. Furthermore, another connection between the concepts is that since well-being and agency are inherently relational, this forces us to see intersectional identities and life-course in a more relational way (Wright, 2016).

The strongest correlation within this nexus is perhaps between well-being and agency; with reference to the capabilities approach, Amartya Sen (2009) explores these links. For example, he argues that people often enact agency in order to pursue an aspect of well-being in which they value. In this way Sen sees agency as a state and well-being as a process. However, he also "emphasizes agency and freedom as both prerequisites for and constituents of wellbeing", and how there may be tension between the two (White, 2016: 9). He (Sen) uses the example "Gandhi's hunger strike during the struggle for Indian independence to detail how people may have reason to pursue goals that undermine their individual wellbeing" (White, 2016: 9). Thus, agency and well-being are not always correlated, and they are still distinct from each other.

The connection between well-being and agency is further understood through Ryan and Deci's (2001) work on universal needs. As illustrated previously, their work on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that autonomy, competency and relatedness are the key integral components of well-being. Thus, with this understanding of well-being

in mind, agency is an important part of well-being. Yet it is important to detail how autonomy is distinct from agency. Autonomy in this case is described as "personal ownership of decisions affecting the self" (Wright, 2012: 20). Whereas as an agent is "someone who acts and brings about change" (Sen, 1999: 19) and agency is "a person's ability to pursue and realize goals she values and has reason to value" (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009: 22). In this way autonomy is concerned with self-government and agency is concerned with the capacity to decide to enact power or action. Thus, agency and autonomy are not necessarily synonymous, as one may enact agency but not necessarily be upon one's own motives.

This section has delineated the connections between intersectional life-course approach, well-being and agency, and their relationship will be further illustrated throughout this thesis. It is also important to note that the order in which these concepts are discussed is significant. This conceptual nexus takes the reader on a journey through the nuances and the complexities of widowhood. It first explores intersectional identities and the life-course, painting a picture of this heterogeneous group of women. By looking at a life-course perspective it will become evident that widowhood does not always impede well-being, but can in fact do the opposite. This then sets the scene for discussions of well-being. The focus on well-being, as opposed to poverty, focuses on what people value rather than what they lack, and this appropriately leads on to discuss agency.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has shown how existing research largely explores widowhood from a static perspective that fails to consider the multidimensionality of widowed women's identities. Academic research has tended to focus on the identity of 'widowed' and the period of 'widowhood', overlooking their multiple intersecting

identities and complex histories. In addition to this, research on widowhood has been centred on older women, and therefore the particular experience of young widows remains underexplored. Consequently the first section delineated the benefits of adopting an intersectional and temporal approach. Through this, the need to reinstate age, caste and life-course within intersectional theory, and the need for a more nuanced approach to ageing was argued.

Prevailing doctrines portray widows as uniformly dispossessed, deprived and ostracised, and resultant research has been commonly based on orthodox understandings of poverty. This work attempts to progress current approaches by incorporating the more nuanced and multidimensional concept of well-being. Consequently the limitations of poverty have been illustrated, and the comparative advantages of adopting well-being, for example, its multidimensionality, subjectivity and appropriateness for gendered research have been highlighted. The specific conceptualisation adopted, which progresses the WED approach by incorporating an intersectional and temporal perspective, and consequently a more embedded perspective, has been expressed.

Research on widowhood has commonly depicted widows as vulnerable and victimised, and while to varying degrees this narrative may hold some truth, depicting them as uniformly powerless is redundant. This chapter has stressed the benefits of adopting agency as an analytical lens; citing specific research from feminist scholars that advocated for attention to be paid to the diverse, subtle, silent and contradictory nature of agential actions. In particular, the importance of positioning agential action *within* the context of power relations, and *beyond* acts of resistance, has been detailed. Furthermore, the way in which this research serves to advance these gendered contributions by deploying an agential continuum was delineated. This research, therefore, builds on current conceptualisations of widowhood through the adopting of intersectionality, well-being and agency. This serves to form a more

embedded, dynamic, multi-dimensional and empowering approach through which widowhood can be researched

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCHING INTERSECTIONAL WELL-BEING AND AGENCY

This chapter sets out my methodological framework. It begins with a discussion of how this inductive and embedded research located the need for a 'feminist participatory' approach. It then delineates the specific methodological tools, the ways in which they serve to support the framework endorsed and the specifics of how they were used. Reflecting this, in total 81 semi-structured interviews and 18 oral histories were completed with 91 participants (see *Appendix 1* for demographic information of these participants). In addition to this, 10 key informant interviews and five focus groups were completed. Then I detail my own personal experience of research, the personal and professional relationships I developed and the associated sensitivities, as well as the issues related with interpretation and translation. Finally, I discuss how the material was analysed.

ARRIVING AT A 'FEMINIST-PARTICIPATORY' APPROACH

My prior research experience taught me the importance of adopting an inductive and reflexive approach that encouraged conversation and collaboration, positioned me as a 'listener' and privileged subjective experiences. I then thought about how these requirements correlated with the methodologies available to me as a researcher, and it was on this basis that a feminist participatory approach was developed.

These requirements could have been partially satisfied through other approaches, such as post-modern[19] and post-colonial methodologies.

[19] A post-modern methodology rejects objective 'truths' and grand narratives associated with positivism (Baber and Murray, 2001; Kitchen and Tate, 2000), and in this way it would help to uncover the complexity of widowhood and help to

However, although these are important and certainly considered within this work, dismantling objective 'truths' and western dominated epistemologies is not a primary aim of this work. Undoubtedly these methodologies would have brought valid contributions, yet a feminist and participatory framework addresses all of these concerns, and in addition to this pays particular attention to emancipatory change, gender relations, positionality and reflexivity.

While feminist methodologies are diverse there is, however, academic consensus that at its core feminist research should aim "for mutual understanding and learning between the researcher and the people who are the subject of research with respect to structures of domination" (Madge et al., 1997: 87). DeVault (1996: 31) further adds that such a methodology seeks to minimise "harm and control in the research process", and supports "research of value to women, leading to social change or action beneficial to women." Feminist methodologies are developed around the following set of largely accepted beliefs and motives; concern for the way in which knowledge is produced; the privileging of subjective experiences over objective 'truths'; dismantling hierarchal relationships within research; attention to positionality and reflexivity and the desire to achieve gender equality more broadly (Madge et al., 1997). Although initially concerned with an absence of feminist concerns within research methods, over the years feminist approaches have been incorporated into research involving both men and women (see Gailey and Prohaska, 2011), and feminism has become a distinct approach used within multiple disciplines (Moss, 2002).

Participatory research has a long history that can be traced back to Freire's (1982) work on learning and participation, as well as early anthropological and geographical work (see Chambers, 1994a; 1994b;

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deconstruct some of the limited ways in which widowhood has been researched prior to this thesis (see *Chapter 2*). A post-colonial framework would bring necessary attention to 'epistemic violence' and the 'fields of power' between the Global North and the Global South, and the subsequent dominant epistemologies that emerge (Raghuram and Madge, 2006).

Chambers and Blackburn, 1996). Akin to feminist approaches, a participatory methodology has many guises. Here I adopt a Participatory Action Research (PAR)[20] approach developed in the 1990s that combines participatory research (PR) and action research (AR). PAR is described as:

> "Research by, with, and for people affected by a particular problem, which takes place in collaboration with academic researchers. It seeks to democratize knowledge production and foster opportunities for empowerment by those involved" (Kindon et al., 2008: 90).

The key characteristics of feminist and participatory approaches - for example, their focus on collaboration, privileging subjective and grassroots experiences, generation of knowledge, minimising hierarchies and their overall motivation for social change, make them highly applicable for this work.

Both feminist and participatory methodologies commonly aspire to generate social change. Addressing issues associated with inequality lies at the heart of feminist research that should be "of value to women, leading to social change or action beneficial to women" (Dowler, 1999: 93). This desire for social change is also inherent within PAR and the foundations of this can be traced back to Paulo Freire's (1970) work that argued that social change lay in the empowerment of those affected by an issue. Thus, these methodologies align with the motivations behind the initial development of my interest in this research in 2010.

Feminist and participatory research focuses on grassroots experiences (Escobar, 1992; Liamputtong, 2010). Feminist scholars particularly highlight the "epistemic violence" that can occur when 'Western' notions of what is legitimatised as 'true knowledge' can supersede

[20] Evidently PAR combines the benefits of PR and AR methodologies. Given the participatory motivations of this research, the focus on collaboration and the desire to initiate positive social change, a PAR methodology was deemed most relevant.

those in the Global South (Spivak, 1988: 295). Given this critique, feminist methodologies have been integral in privileging embedded experiences. Similarly Liamputtong (2010: 177) stresses that participatory approaches "seek to 'redress issues of unequal power, positionality and Eurocentricity' which may happen when field research is undertaken in non-Western contexts". In a broader sense these methodologies help to dismantle common ethnocentric epistemologies based around Western constructions of knowledge (Mohanty, 1988; Nagar, 1997; Vira and James, 2011). For example, through their theorising of economies, Vira and James illustrate that such theorisations are drawn from experiences of the Global North, whereas the economies of the Global South remain largely absent. Feminist and participatory frameworks try to disrupt the perpetuation of the dominant Western epistemologies through their focus on grassroots experiences.

Unsurprisingly, to support this knowledge creation and to evade epistemic violence both frameworks focus on *interaction* rather than an *extraction,* where participants are viewed as "partners" rather than "objects" of research (Bergold and Thomas, 2012: 9) (see also Chambers, 1994a and 1994b; Renzetti, 1997). A focus on collaboration and a mutual understanding between the researcher and participants are central to both approaches (Chambers, 1994b; Madge et al., 1997). Encouraging the participants' involvement opens space for their active input and is implicit in work on agency. Furthermore, this focus on interaction encourages greater attention to subjectivity, this echoes endeavours within feminist approaches (see England, 2015; Madge et al., 1997; Renzetti, 1997) that have historically rejected objectivity. Attention to subjective and embedded experiences is also evident within PAR approaches. Houh and Kalsem (2015: 265) who incorporated PAR into their scholarly work as critical race/feminist legal researchers stress that "PAR, in sync philosophically with feminism in so many respects, puts a high value on lived experiences as a source of knowledge". This focus on subjectivity also inherently

encourages greater flexibility; each research interaction better reflects the individual and their specific situation.

Due to their focus on collaboration participatory approaches inherently breed a need for attention to positionality and reflexivity, however scholarly work written about participatory approaches has often overlooked postionality of the participants and the researchers themselves and reflexivity more broadly (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008). Conversely, positionality, reflexivity and attention to the politics of research are much more developed within feminist methodologies. Feminists have advocated for the acknowledgement of 'self-reflexivity' (England, 1994) and 'positionality' (Ansell, 2001) that intrinsically accompany the researcher from preparation to dissemination. In feminist approaches, the researchers' identities and areas of possible implication are *written in* the research. In this way, attention to positionality and self-reflexivity within feminist methodologies complements their underdevelopment within participatory approaches.

There are other potential concerns with participatory approaches. The group format endemic to PAR can encourage generalisations, thus more individual perspectives and nuances can be obfuscated, this relates the lack of attention to positionalities and identities. This issue is particularly evident in focus groups where the narrative can be dominated by the voices of one or two individuals. Related to this issue of dominant voices, Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) how marginalised groups can 'echo' "the voices of the powerful, either as a conscious way of appearing to comply with the more powerful parties wishes, or as a result of the internalization of dominant views and values". Thus, the embedded perspectives that should emanate from the PAR methods are then debated. Furthermore, associated with the group format, participatory methodologies can presume that there are communities and groups who will *want to, and will happily, participate together*. Such activities can actually serve to create factions and aggravate existing

social divisions, thus potentially 'un-doing' the positive progress intended (Guijt and Shah, 1998). In the context of the current work, focus groups were mostly conducted with Women for Human Rights (WHR)[21] Nepal members who were already comfortable and familiar with each other.

Feminist approaches largely advocate for the development of strong relationships with research participants. However, fieldwork demanding such human engagement might actually be harmful to the participants, especially when the researcher is free to leave when the participant is not (see England, 1994). Such situations can cause the researcher to feel immense guilt, and can also perpetuate the vulnerability of marginalised groups, in turn reinforcing the "fields of power" between researchers and participants (Kondo, 1990: 43). Related to this, much of the scholarship on feminist frameworks stresses the need to focus on collaboration and to destabilise boundaries; however boundaries "may serve an important ethical role in keeping both researchers and participants emotionally and physically safe" (Cuomo and Massaro, 2014: 10). Furthermore, setting parameters can ensure that everyone is acutely aware of their role, representation and responsibility within the fieldwork; in turn this can also help to reiterate the temporary involvement of the researcher in the life-world of the researched and avoid the respective 'guilt' and 'vulnerability' discussed above.

Yet, such critiques of feminist methodologies are essential, making us, as feminist researchers, question assumptions made about 'good practice'. In this way, it is perhaps appropriate to develop relationships, focus on collaboration, *write in* positionality and dismantle boundaries with consideration of the extent to which it is sensitive and ethical for each unique research engagement. In addition, it should be noted that

[21] As detailed in *Chapter 1*, WHR is a Nepali non-governmental organisation (NGO), which fights for equality on the basis of marital status.

over-concern with positionality, reflexivity and responsibilities can incite fear amongst researchers, paralysing them from entering the field altogether (Sultana, 2007).

It is evident that feminist and participatory approaches have many comparable characteristics, their focus on conversation, interaction, subjectivity and attention to grassroots experiences are fundamental to this doctoral work. In addition, through their combined synthesis, the weaknesses of one are countered by the advantages of the other. For instance, the lack of attention to the politics of research and positionality in PAR is complemented by its prevalence in feminist approaches. Consequently, their integration creates a holistic and integrated approach through which the complexities of widowhood can be researched. Lastly, it should be noted that whilst these methodologies endeavour to initiate social change, they should not be blindly viewed as development 'remedies', nor do they automatically, and inherently, lead to feminist and participatory practice (Cooke, 2001).

TRIANGULATING METHODS

This research deployed a range of qualitative methodological tools, including semi-structured interviews, oral histories, focus groups deploying PAR techniques and key informant interviews, and producing a field diary. Both feminist (England, 2006; England, 2015) and participatory (Bourgeault et al., 2010: 141) approaches generally "favour qualitative methods for their nuanced attention to participants' perspectives and power relations". The methods used support the feminist and participatory roots of the research, the desire to engender trust, dialogue and exchange, and to privilege subjective and embedded experiences. The feminist participatory nature of this work, my own

previous research experiences and the existing research on widowhood has inspired the methods adopted.

Existing studies on widowhood helped to shape the tools used. Research on widowhood has deployed a range of methods from surveys, life histories, interviews (structured, semi-structured and unstructured), to workshops, focus groups and key informant interviews (see *Appendix 2).* The majority of studies, particularly those concerned with uncovering embedded and subjective experiences, have typically used qualitative methods (see Korang-Okrah, 2011; Lamb, 2000 and 2013; Lenette, 2013; Ramnarain, 2014 and 2016 and Yadav, 2016). In contrast, those with a more quantitative focus have used surveys and secondary data analysis (see Chen and Drèze, 1992; Drèze and Srinivasan, 1997; Sossau, 2002 and Thomas 2008).

During my own previous research engagements, I came to understand that conversation, exchanging stories and spending time with participants - largely through *chiya khanne* (drinking tea) - were fundamental in building trusting relationships. A strong connection between participants and myself was essential in negotiating the sensitive topic and creating an environment conducive to uncovering personal experiences. Since these previous research engagements I have introduced new methodological tools including oral histories and PAR techniques in focus groups. With respect to the motivation of paying attention to widows' life-courses and varied identities I wanted to introduce oral histories. Furthermore, the focus groups I conducted involved group discussions, but I also introduced PAR related activities such as community mapping, well-being ranking and problem tree development (see Chevalier and Buckles, 2013; Moser and Mcilwaine, 1999).

Existing research has rarely adopted oral histories (notable exceptions include Galvin, 2005; Lamb, 2000 and Wadley, 1995), and studies have

generally adopted only two or three methods (see *Appendix 2*). With the tools adopted, this project advances the existing methodological approaches by deploying five methods. This multi-method approach has worked well and enabled a collection of various types of material, which consequently helped to reveal the diverse ways in which widowhood is experienced. *Table 3.1* illustrates the tools adopted and how they allowed me to interrogate and explore the related research objectives. Notably, some methods related to particular questions more than others. The methods strengthen each other through their triangulation; the possible weaknesses of one were counteracted by the strengths of another.

Table 3.1: Research objectives and related methods

Research question	**Methods adopted**	**Comment**
To explore the diverse experiences of widowhood through an intersectional lens	-Oral histories	Oral histories explored widows' experiences and identities across the life-course. This helped decentre the identity of 'widowed' and the period of 'widowhood'.
	-Semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured interviews included more direct questions associated with intersectional identities and ageing.
To conceptualise well-being from the embedded perspective of widowed women	-Focus groups	Focus groups involved discussions related to well-being and activities associated with ranking and drawing.
	-Oral histories	Oral histories explored well-being over the life-course.
	-Semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured interviews involved specific questions and exercises associated with conceptualisations of well-being and how it changed across the life-course.
To examine the multiple and complex ways in which widowed women assert agency	-Focus groups	Focus groups involved PAR activities that focused on agency.
	-Key informant interviews	Agency in the context of families, communities, the third sector and the State were discussed in key informant interviews.
	-Semi-structured interviews	Gendered cultural practices and agency were discussed more directly in semi-structured interviews.

METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviewing is a form of in-depth interviewing and was the main method deployed. Interviewing is a long-standing feminist method, used for example in the work of Avishai (2008), Brickell and Chant (2010), Chant (1997), Cuomo and Massaro (2014), Nagar (2000), Moss (2002) and Romani (2016). Interviewing commonly generates trust between the participant and researcher, privileges individual experiences and facilitates conversations and dialogue. Such attributes are especially critical for research on a sensitive topic (Hesse Biber, 2014).

It is believed that interviews "convey a deeper feeling for or more emotional closeness to the persons studied", and are thus instrumental in revealing sensitive information (Jayaratne, 1983: 145). I met widows who had never discussed widowhood before and others who disclosed very personal experiences, thus a method that facilitated such sensitivity and emotional closeness was essential. The conversational and interactive characteristics of interviews also made participants feel comfortable, and subsequently helped to build trust and develop relationships; Lee (1999: 209) states that “sustained trustful relations between the researcher and researched add to both the volume and the quality of data”.

Interviews focus on participants’ voices, and thus the production of knowledge is centred on them (Byrne, 2004). It is said, “interviews privilege respondents’ voices, according authority to their experience, rather than subjecting them to scientific scrutiny” (Thien, 2009: 74). Focusing on the individual this way was fundamental in acknowledging agency, and the individual and diverse experiences of widowhood, and

was therefore in keeping with the intersectional, embedded and agential aims of this thesis.

Although I wanted participants to be involved in this research as much as possible, I was aware that the ease with which they would be able to answer questions, and their need for structure, would vary. I knew that some women would feel more comfortable with more structured interviews, and that they can feel intimidated when asked to talk more freely. Consequently, it was deemed best to conduct semi-structured interviews so participants could, to an extent, direct the conversation, but if the conversation dried up the interview schedule could still be referred to (see *Appendix 3* and *4*). Geographers, and especially feminist geographers, have used interviews with loose themes, helping to cover the necessary material in the interview, but allowing for flexibility according to the individual (Valentine, 1997). In addition, semi-structured interviews help to bring out "the lived experience while also addressing theoretically driven variables of interest", allowing me to attend to my research questions, whilst also being responsive to the emanating material (Galletta, 2013: 24).

In order to ease participants into the engagement, I started with basic demographic questions about their caste, age, maternal home and family and so on (see *Appendix 3* and *4*). This was important for obtaining baseline information about a population that has been, up until now, largely absent, and also allowed basic analyses to be made across participants, underpinning the rich qualitative material collected. This demographic information was also essential for embedding and contextualising conceptions of well-being and agential actions according to an individual's social identity and specific life situation.

Interviews were based around specific themes, mainly intersectionality, well-being and agency[22]. Depending on the responses, follow up questions were asked for clarification and to gain greater detail. In accordance with an individual's specific situation, questions were asked or eliminated where appropriate. For example, if a participant was elderly it was not appropriate to ask questions about their potential remarriage, as they may have been offended if asked such questions. This flexible format was also useful given that before meeting participants I did not always have prior information about their circumstances. During interviews I also conducted a well-being ranking exercise[23]; participants were asked to rank dimensions of well-being (see *Appendix 3*) from the most to the least important. After the ranking exercise there was a short discussion on why they had decided to rank them as such. In many ways, this was just as revealing as the ranking exercise itself, as these discussions helped to shed light on why and how aspects of well-being were particularly important. Interviews generally lasted between 90 minutes and two and a half hours, and there was often time before or after the engagement for 'tea drinking', so visits could last up to four hours.

Oral Histories

Oral histories are a frequently used method in both feminist (see Gluck and Patai (eds.), 1991; McKay, 2002 and Nagar, 1997) and participatory research (Ames and Diepstra, 2010); an oral history is a form of

[22] The interview schedules 1 and 2 (see *Appendix 3* and *4*) reflect the first and second research periods. As mentioned, after the first field trip I returned to trips I readjusted some of the questions to reflect the material that emanated from the first stage of fieldwork.

[23] In interviews although participants were given a full list they ranked as many or few as they wished. On a few occasions participants struggled with this exercise, in these cases I decided to stop the exercise and talk more generally about well-being. During the second research period I focused on the aspects of well-being that frequently emanated from the first period, including family - and associated altruism - self-confidence and independence. To make time for these new areas of exploration, and for the revised questions on agency (*see Appendix 3* and *4*), I felt it was best to adjust the well-being ranking activity (see *Appendix 3*).

participatory research, as both "require collaboration between researchers and their subjects" (Ames and Diepstra**,** 2010: 400). The main premise behind histories is that participants are the narrators, establishing the researcher as a listener. Importantly, oral histories 'give voice' to those who were previously ignored, serving to encourage agential capacity (Anderson et al., 1987; Riley and Harvey, 2007). The use of oral histories in the case of this research was also motivated by a desire to not privilege only the period of widowhood.

Oral histories were primarily conducted with participants who particularly enjoyed participating in the interview; since I had already developed trust and a rapport I felt that they would be comfortable with this deeper interaction. Oral histories were a similar length to the semi-structured interviews. Although the intention was to let participants recount their life story, an oral history schedule was helpful for prompting participants when needed and was used as a loose reference point (see *Appendix 5*). The oral history also included participatory elements, for example, participants were asked to draw[24] a simple graph indicating how their well-being had changed over the life-course and what had influenced such changes.

Along with semi-structured interviews, oral histories were the most revealing method in this research. Their individual format allowed in-depth and personal discussions and detailed insight into the experiences of widowhood. They also permitted a greater capacity for further questioning and clarification; given this I decided to focus my time on interviews and oral histories.

[24] If participants were uncomfortable using a pen, my interpreter or I draw it on their behalf and they would instruct us as to how they wanted it drawn.

Focus Groups

Wilkinson (1998: 111) stresses that focus groups are valuable for:

> "addressing feminist ethical concerns about power and the imposition of meaning; generating high quality, interactive data; and offering the possibility of theoretical advances regarding the co-construction of meaning between people".

The solidarity engendered within focus groups is inherent to the motivation to engender social change inherent in participatory (Logie, 2014) and feminist research (Madriz, 2000), and are also conducted within development research (Lloyd-Evans, 2006) more broadly. It is hoped that the focus groups conducted created a sense of solidarity and group cohesion, consequently empowering participants, strengthening their group and the legacy of this research. Focus groups are especially empowering when they involve participant activities such as ranking and mapping.

Focus groups can also be particularly useful for discussing sensitive issues amongst groups of people who all face the same problem. Furthermore, they can help to reveal relations and the collective nature of life (Lloyd-Evans, 2006); in a country where relationships are central to well-being and identity construction, a method that complements this is vital (ibid.). Related to this, women - when they have the opportunity - enjoy socialising and talking in groups.

I conducted five focus groups: three were organised by WHR and undertaken in their district offices in Kirtipur and Lalitpur, while the other two were organised by Bhotu-Indira Social Welfare Organisation (BISWO) and were undertaken in a school classroom in Baluva (see Appendix 6 for focus group schedule). Discussions generally lasted between two and three hours and the number of participants ranged

from six to eleven women25. The focus groups were designed to be conversational, interactive, participatory and, where possible, fun; I provided tea and snacks to try and generate a relaxed atmosphere. The first part consisted of an open dialogue about widowhood. This was an effective and appropriate introduction to ease participants into the interaction, and helped to establish some common themes that could be discussed in more detail during the subsequent activities. The second part of the focus group involved other exercises including drawing problem-trees, community mapping, well-being ranking26 (see *Figure 3.1*) and art work (Chevalier and Buckles, 2013).

The initial activity after the discussion either involved asking participants to draw what a good life meant to them or to draw a community map of places they engaged with and how they felt about these places. Problem-trees were also produced. Here, participants detailed the issues they faced as widowed women, these acted as the branches of the tree. I then asked them to detail the causes of these issues that became the roots of the tree. From this, the group developed a solution chart. This involved exploring the possible short and long-term solutions and indicating the institutions, people and spaces where they felt such support was available (see *Appendix 6*). Depending on the group and its dynamic different activities were undertaken.

[25] I had asked the gatekeepers for a maximum of six people to attend, but on three occasions the gatekeepers invited more. I could not turn women away who made the effort to attend so I readjusted the activities.

[26] Women in the focus groups were given a series of fifteen cards and drawn on them were dimensions of well-being, for example self-confidence, voice, basic needs, house and family (see *Figure 3.1* below). Akin to interviews, focus group participants were asked to rank them from the most important to least important and after the ranking exercise there was a short discussion on why they had decided to rank them as such. This exercise was undertaken in three of the five focus groups.

Figure 3.1: Well-being ranking exercise in a focus group

(Source: researchers own photograph, October 2013)

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews added an important dimension to the research, helping to situate the individual narratives of widows within the wider context of local communities, the development sector and the Nepali State. Key informant interviews were also central to identifying the issues widowed women faced and the support and services they received from NGO's, INGO's and the state. This is critical given the central motivation of this research to initiate social change; by understanding the services, programs and provisions given to widowed women this research can recommend future pursuits for the key stakeholders involved in this work (see *Chapter 7*).

The majority of the key informant interviews were conducted towards the end of the second research period, so that the material from interviews with widowed participants informed the questions asked and topics discussed with the key informants. Given the aspirations of this research to engender social change, the knowledge and expertise of key informants was integral in establishing how this work could initiate change for widowed women in the future. In turn, both feminist (Armstrong, 2012; Jungar and Oinas (2010) and participatory scholars (Barron et al., 2011) have used key informant interviews.

Ten key informants[27] drawn from a number of International Non-Governmental Organistions (INGOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Government sectors participated in this research (see *Table 3.2*). Within the Government sector, this included the Chief District Officer (CDO) of Kathmandu, the Director General of the Ministry of

[27] I also had more informal meetings and conservations with representatives from organisations such as Care and Development Organisation (CDO) Nepal, Feet Ministries and Raksha Nepal. These discussions were impromptu and unplanned; therefore for the purpose of this research I would not consider them to be key informant interviews. However, this is not to say that these people did not have the credentials to be key informants, it was rather the nature of the conversation that made it such.

Women, Children and Social Welfare (MOWCSW) and an advisor working for the National Women Commission (NWC). Representatives from national based organisations such as WHR were also interviewed, as were professionals from Nepali subsidiaries of INGOs including HelpAge, Care International, Department For International Development (DFID) and United States Agency for International Development (US-AID). These interviews generally lasted between 40 and 90 minutes and took place at participants' workplaces or in cafes. I was introduced to some of these informants through contacts, while in other cases I found their details online and I emailed them directly. The interview involved general questions that all key informants were asked while other questions varied appropriately according to the person being interviewed (see *Appendix 7* for key informant schedule). Prior to any key informant interview I conducted background research on the individual and their related organisation, and formulated research questions accordingly.

Table 3.2: Key informants and related institutions

Key informants and related institutions	**Services related organisation provides to widows/women**
Advisor from German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ) to Nepal's National Women Commission	-uphold justice for women -create awareness of discrimination against women -strive to end gendered based violence -monitor programs and policies with regard to women's rights -lobby for inclusive representation of women
Chief District Officer of Kathmandu (the CDO's primary role is to maintain law and justice)	-ensure law, order and justice is upheld -support women/widows in gaining justice -provides citizenship cards and resolves disputes about obtaining citizenship
Director General of the Ministry of Women and Children[28]	-collects data on widowed women -skill training -shelter victims of domestic violence -cooperative and savings group -provides widowed women with pension -provides emergency trust fund for widowed women
Director of HelpAge Nepal	-saving credit provision -provides awareness training -advocator of older peoples rights -provides healthcare check up's -collects data on older people -writes legislation for Government
Founder and President of WHR	-lobbies Government on issues associated with widowed women -collects data on widowed women -provides income generation projects -provides rights based training -education provision -provides scholarships for widow's children -provides safe house for widowed women

[28] The Government provision for widowed women is administered through the MOWCSW. At present widowed women regardless of their age receive 1000 rupee a month as a pension. The MOWCSW also provide Trust Fund solely for the single women (widows) in Nepal and has subsequently declared that it will develop a National Action Plan for Widows in Nepal in which WHR will be included in drafting, preparing and enforcing this plan.

Gender Advisor at CARE Nepal	-addresses social, cultural and political discrimination -addresses issues of equality and justice -works on issues associated with women's empowerment
Medical doctor and freelance writer	-advocator for women's rights
Social Development Advisor at Department of International Development Nepal	-funds MOWCSW -works on issues associated with women's empowerment -provides employment opportunities for women -strive to reduce violence against women -health care provision
Social Inclusion Coordinator (GESI) at the Hariyo Ban Program (an environmental conversation programme coordinated by a number of stakeholders including World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Care Nepal)	-supports livelihoods of rural Nepali women
Training coordinator at the United States Agency for International Development (US-AID)	-provides support to the MOWCSW -maternal health care provision -provides skills training -provides income generation projects

A Fieldwork Diary

Exploring the importance of diaries in fieldwork and their relative lack of use within geography, Meth (2009: 153) illustrates how diaries can be a vital means of analysis, and also provide "important insights into the methodological practices shaping the overall argument of the research". She maintains that fieldwork diaries can be especially useful for research like this with ethnographic and reflexive approaches. Consequently, I documented my ethnographic observations, resultant

reflections and personal feelings in my fieldwork diary. While I endeavoured to do this every evening, time and tiredness often hindered this, so I wrote in the diary the next day when I was feeling more refreshed. During specific research engagements I wrote down observations, for example what participants were wearing, their mannerisms, their vocal intonation, who was at the interview, how I perceived the participants to be feeling and other thoughts that surfaced. These notes were subsequently used for thematic analysis and serve to support the information collected. Related to this, whilst I paid critical attention to the importance of content and dialogue in the interview, I also tried to observe and take note of what was left unsaid, and what that could also say about the experience of widowhood. For example, what did participants took for granted, what they avoided discussing and their emotions more broadly.

CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

Delineating 'The Field': Situating Nepal and the Kathmandu Valley

With their attention to positionality, reflexivity and the politics of fieldwork location, feminist scholars have also been particularly fundamental in highlighting the ambiguity surrounding delineating 'the field'. Feminist academics argue that the field is not confined to the exact 'place' of research, and transcends multiple spaces (England, 1994). As such, researchers are never exactly 'in' or 'out' of the field, and the field is omnipresent (Sharp and Dowler, 2011). Drawing on her fieldwork in New York and Sudan, Katz (1994: 72) stresses:

> "We may begin to learn not to displace or separate so as to see and speak, but to see, be seen, speak, listen and be heard in the multiply determined fields that we are everywhere, always in".

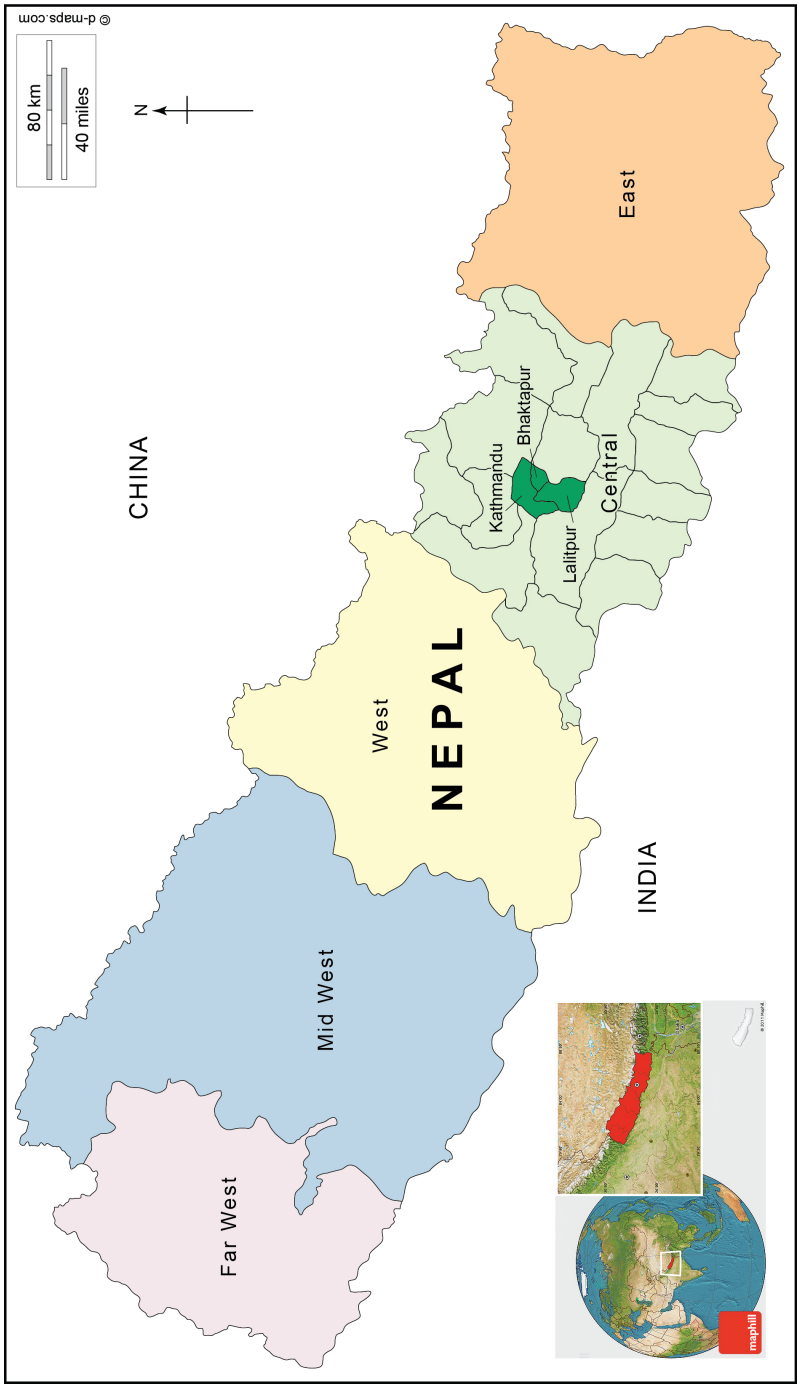
Whilst this research was specifically located in the Kathmandu Valley I was never explicitly *in* or *out* of the field; my long-standing relationship with Nepal, the organisations I work with and the women who have participated in this research means that 'the field' has expanded across my six-year engagement. I *physically* leave Nepal, yet the relationships and contacts I have developed mean that, *emotionally* and *socially* speaking, I never actually leave. When I am in the UK, I Skype and send Facebook messages to my friends and participants, I 'like' their photos', I fundraise, I talk about Nepal on a daily basis, I keep up to date with the news and check the weather there (Cons, 2014). In these ways and many more, I will never leave 'the field'.

This said, it is important to explain why the research was located in Nepal, and the Kathmandu Valley specifically. First, the decision to undertake in this research in Nepal correlates with the aspirations of feminist and participatory methodologies. This research is part of a six year long ethnographic interest in Nepali widows and Nepal more broadly; prior to this doctoral work I had developed relationships, a deep understanding of widowhood, knowledge of the local culture and learnt basic Nepali. Second, there is a strong empirical case for the location of this research. As detailed in *Chapter 2,* within Hindu cultures there are specific social, cultural, embodied and religious rituals expected of widowed women making it a rich place for exploring the complexity of widowhood. Although there is abundant scholarly work on Indian widows, in neighbouring Nepal, studies on widows are more limited. Whilst both countries are predominantly Hindu, Nepal's differing socio-cultural history consisting of indigenous Tibeto-Burman people, and subsequent influxes of Indo-Aryan people, make it distinct from India.

The project was conducted within three districts that make up the Kathmandu Valley; these include Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur (see *Figure 3.2*). Kathmandu is officially the capital of Nepal, however

there are four ancient cities within the Valley, including Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur and Kirtipur. Whilst there are official boundaries, the urban sprawl is such that there is little distinction between the four cities and the three districts. Beyond the metropolitan areas, there are villages within the Valley that have limited access to transportation.

Figure 3.2: Map of Nepal indicating the three research districts



(Source: Queen Mary School of Geographer Cartographer, 2016)

The decision to establish this research project in the Kathmandu Valley was premised first on my previous research engagement, and second, its central location. Taking each in turn, I already had extensive experience working in Nepal, and particularly within the Kathmandu Valley. Further to this, I had a strong understanding of the Valley's physical and socio-cultural 'geography'. This was particularly helpful in contextualising experiences of widowhood, and navigating the city and the challenges it brought. Furthermore, due to my previous research trips, I had established networks and relationships with key gatekeepers such as Partnership for Sustainable Development (PSD) Nepal, Feet Ministries and WHR Nepal, who had three district offices situated there. These gatekeepers were critical in accessing participants, while also setting up introductions to other new gatekeepers.

The centrality of the Valley as a populous area meant that there was a large pool of potential participants[29]. Due to its size and pull as a metropolitan area, widows from varied backgrounds (in relation to age, caste, religion, language spoken, employment and educational level) were also potentially accessible, supporting the intersectional aims of the research. Furthermore, its central location meant there were large numbers of organisations and institutions located there, invariably aiding access to participants and key informants. This also allowed me to explore the ways in which widows interacted within such organisations and spaces. In addition, given the lack of research on widowhood in Nepal, it was appropriate and practical to ground it in this central area. On a more personal note, having previous contacts and friends there, meant I had their much-needed support, and thus it was a pleasurable and enjoyable place to live and work. Living in the Valley was relatively safe for a 'young white woman' as compared to

[29] According to the 2011 census, approximately two and a half million people live in the Kathmandu Valley (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). More importantly as detailed previously WHR Nepal estimates that there are 659, 837 people who have been widowed, of which 75% are women (WHR, 2010).

other parts of Nepal, and I was able to find comfortable accommodation there.

It is not only important to look the Kathmandu Valley as the site of research, but also the specific sites of the research engagements, how they affect the dynamics of the interaction and how they can be used to interpret the emanating material (Gilbert, 1994; McDowell, 1998). Elwood and Martin (2000: 649) suggest that the "interview site itself produces 'micro-geographies' of spatial relations and meaning". Interviews and oral histories were conducted in offices, cafes, fields, temples, schools, 'massage' parlours, shops and restaurants. As much as possible I let participants choose the location, thus hopefully enabling them to select places where they felt comfortable. Furthermore, letting participants determine the location was important in revealing more about their life; for example, practicalities and responsibilities emerged, such as time constraints, working hours and childcare responsibilities. Other more personal matters, such as desire for privacy and difficult relationships with family members, also influenced their decision. Significantly, the majority chose to be interviewed in their homes. Arguably, locating interviews in participants' homes helped to partially address power hierarchies while also revealing much about their everyday spaces of living. Objects, décor and possessions help to build a picture a person's life, initiating interesting conversation. This was particularly helpful in oral histories as these possessions illuminated a participant's past (Elwood and Martin, 2000).

Arriving In The Kathmandu Valley

In August 2013, I travelled to Kathmandu for four months; in this time I focused on getting back in touch with old contacts and establishing new contacts, recruiting participants, settling myself into the Nepali way of life and conducting interviews. On this first trip, I wanted to focus on

semi-structured interviews given that this was the main method proposed (see below). When I had gained more confidence with interviewing and speaking Nepali, I started to gather oral histories. I had anticipated undertaking focus groups later in this first research period. This was in order to discuss, in a group format, findings emanating from individual interviews. However, I had the opportunity to conduct them earlier in the research and I acted on this.

In December 2013 I returned to London for visa purposes[30] and to spend two months reflecting on the first research trip. This period provided me with the time and space to analyse the material collected, while also affording me the chance to discuss the initial findings with my supervisors. During this time, I conducted some preliminary analysis, identified areas that should be explored further, assessed how my research findings connected with my conceptual framework, and spent time exploring literature that supported this. I produced a report that synthesised these thoughts and this allowed my supervisors to see how the research had progressed. Before going back to Nepal for the second stage of fieldwork, I formulated some new questions and readjusted some existing questions in response to the preliminary analysis – hence why there are two interview schedules (see *Appendix 3* and *4*).

I went back to Nepal in March 2014 to complete the research. I conducted all the key informant interviews during this second trip. In light of the participatory nature of this work I wanted participants to lead the narrative, so key informant interviews were left until later in the fieldwork. I returned to London in June 2014, by which time I had

[30] I contacted the Nepali Embassy in London prior to starting research, about the type of visa I would require. The Embassy assured me that an on-arrival tourist visa would be appropriate. Although I was hesitant about obtaining a tourist visa I had little choice but to take their word for it. A tourist visa only allowed me five months in one calendar year in Nepal, which is why my fieldwork was positioned in such a way that my first trip would finish at end of the calendar year and I would return to Nepal in early 2014 on a new tourist visa.

completed 81 semi-structured interviews, 18 oral histories, 10 key informant interviews and five focus groups.

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

I recruited participants in two ways: first, through organisational gatekeepers and second, through 'snowballing' from my personal contacts. Contacts made with organisations, such as PSD, WHR and Feet Ministries (see below), during previous visits to Nepal were utilised to gain access to widowed participants. I also contacted new gatekeeper organisations directly, specifically those that were orientated towards supporting women, with the hope that they would be supporting widowed women. These included Raksha Nepal, Nepal Women's Disabled Association (NWDA) and Care and Development (CD0) Nepal (see *Table 3.3*). Importantly, I felt it was vital not to recruit solely through organisations, because widowed members often had training and discussions that could potentially result in a commonality of attitudes and experiences. As such I made a concerted effort to recruit participants outside of these organisations by snowballing within my own personal networks. Notably all the research on widowhood in Nepal, excluding Galvin (2005) and Ramnarain (2014, 2016), has recruited participants solely through WHR.

Table 3.3: Gatekeepers involved in the research

Gatekeepers	**Primary activities**	**Nature of engagement**	**Provision of services specifically for widowed women**
Bhotu-Indira Social Welfare Organisation (BISWO)	Social enterprise providing employment and training to women	-accessed participants -interviewed founder who is widowed -organised two focus groups	-do not have any services particularly for widowed women
Care and Development Organisation (CDO) Nepal	Supports adults and children working in brick factories	-interviewed founder	-do not have any services particularly for widowed women
Divine Service Home	Old age home *(ashram)* specifically for women	-I did not interview the women individually but talked to them in groups	-provide accommodation, food and religious activities to older women many of which are widowed
Feet ministries Nepal	Christian based organisation that runs a number of orphanages	-accessed participants	-provide widowed women's children with accommodation in orphanage and education
Nepal Disabled Women's Association (NDWA)	Supports disabled women	-interviewed President of NWDA who is widowed	-do not have any services particularly for widowed women
Partnership for Sustainable Development Nepal (PSD Nepal)	Social development organsiation that aims to support the most vulnerable communities	-accessed participants -introduced me to BISWO	-do not have any services particularly for widowed women
Raksha Nepal	Supports the health and education of sex workers	-accessed participants -discussed issues related to	-do not have any services particularly for widowed

		widowhood, marginalised women and the sex industry with employees at Raskha	women
Women for Human Rights (WHR)	Working towards the elimination of discrimination on the basis of marital status	-accessed participants -attended meetings and talks held by WHR -interviewed founder who is widowed -organised three focus groups	-have a number of services for widowed women including rights training, advocacy work, education provision, employment opportunities and scholarship for widows children

Through these gatekeepers, and my personal networks, I was able to recruit 91 participants for the oral histories and semi-structured interview; 42 were recruited through organisations and 49 by snowballing from my personal contacts. Consequently, I achieved a relative balance where some participants were recruited through organisations while others were not. At this point, it should be noted that of the 91 participants involved in this research, five were not widowed: three were technically separated from their husbands rather than widowed, one woman's husband was 'missing', while the fifth had never married. Upon organising interviews I had reiterated to gatekeepers that my research was about widowhood. However, perhaps because of the new term to describe widowed women – 'single women' – these gatekeepers got confused. When we interviewed these women it transpired that they were not actually widowed, although it was clear that some identified as such. Since these women took time to meet us and were eager to talk, I decided to continue with the interviews. These engagements brought valuable insight into the

experience of marriage, single-life and gendered cultural practices in Nepal.

'SILENCE AND VOICE': LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION

> "Researchers—and again, by extension, translators—are active producers of research" (Temple, 2002: 845).

Given that this study was conducted in Nepali, reflexive attention to language, interpretation and translation is particularly necessary. Feminist scholars such as Spivak (1992) have been fundamental in illustrating the power of translation and interpretation, and the way in which it shapes dominant epistemologies and the wider feminist agenda.

'Mero Nepali Bhasa': My Nepali Language

While I already spoke and understood basic Nepali, when I started this doctoral research I wanted to improve my Nepali language skills. Surprisingly even in London, Nepali classes were hard to come across: while I eventually found one class offered at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), I decided it was not suitable as it involved writing and reading in Devanagari script. For the purpose of this research, I felt it was more important to focus on spoken and conversational Nepali. As such, in my first year of the research, I had a private tutor who was also a student at QMUL. Upon arriving in Nepal I supplemented this with five days intensive language training. My spoken Nepali progressed quickly after this; I used it on a daily basis when talking to shopkeepers, bus conductors and even strangers who were curious about my work. Speaking Nepali, for example, when ordering food, buying vegetables and getting on the bus eventually

became second nature. Over time, my Nepali improved and I was able to introduce myself to my research participants and tell them something about my life. As I became more confident, I started to ask many of the initial questions in the interviews and I understood many of the responses. My ability to do this was crucial as it meant that I could initiate conversations around the interview schedule.

My endeavour to speak and improve my Nepali resonates with feminist methodologies that commonly advocate that researchers have at least a basic grasp of local languages and are aware of the local customs and cultures (Edwards, 1998). I firmly believe that my knowledge of the language and culture made participants 'warm' to me, this was obviously critical in building positive and trusting relationships and in uncovering personal experiences and perspectives of widowhood. Many participants were especially pleased with my attempts to speak Nepali, as they told me that few foreigners they came into contact with did so. Others explained how they felt special that someone from another country had taken an interest and travelled to talk to them. Related to this, women enjoyed talking and learning about my culture, we talked about the differences and also found common ground (Valentine, 2002). Moreover, in order to gain trust and develop relationships I needed to 'give something of myself'; by this I mean telling participants about my life, family and culture and generally being open to talk, cry and laugh together. I wanted the research process to be an interaction, conversation and engagement where there was active input from both sides, speaking Nepali enabled me to do this.

Although I was quite proficient in speaking 'basic' Nepali, I still needed the help of an interpreter as my Nepali was not advanced enough to ask questions and understand responses related to, for example, ageing, agency and well-being. Before detailing what this undertook, it is important to acknowledge that my inability to speak Nepali fluently, my confusion of vocabulary and grammatical mistakes made participants

laugh and feel at ease. My partial knowledge meant women taught me words and phrases and also taught me about Nepali culture more broadly. Therefore *I* was a recipient of *their* knowledge; this meant I could position myself as a listener and learner, addressing any potential power hierarchies. Furthermore, some participants explained that they were comfortable disclosing information to me as they thought, due to language barriers, that it would be difficult for me to tell anyone.

'Working With' Interpreters

> "Virtually all social research poses ethical dilemmas of some sort, is never value-free, and is shot through with disparities of power operating at different contextual levels. Working with interpreters is no exception." (Edwards, 1998: 206)

In this way Edwards advocates the importance of 'writing in' the relationships researchers have with interpreters, and that interpreters should be seen as 'working with' researchers as, in this way, they are no longer invisible in the research process. The importance of interpreters and research assistants within the research process, and how their roles have been consistently downplayed within academia, is further stressed by Middleton and Cons (2014). These wider debates have shaped the considered way that my interpreters were integrated into the research and its subsequent discussion.

Having established contacts from previous research trips, I was optimistic about finding suitable interpreters. There are many young people who have experience in working on gender-based issues, since the 'development' sector is one of the largest 'industries' in Nepal. My two previous interpreters Arya and Rangita[31] (who had worked with me during my previous fieldwork trips) were unable to work with me

[31] Rangita was in Norway undertaking her master's degree and while Arya was still living and working in Kathmandu but had other employment. Arya, who was my interpreter in 2010 when I undertook my undergraduate research, has taken a keen interest in my work and has subsequently become a close friend. When I returned to Nepal in 2013 Arya volunteered to help me where she could. We mostly worked together on Saturdays or in the morning or evening during the working week.

full time. I emailed friends and contacts before I arrived in Kathmandu asking if they could recommend an interpreter. They sent the job specification I had produced to their friends and their peers. I also contacted the National College for Higher Education and one of the administrative staff there was kind enough to email recent graduates. In addition, an advert was posted on The NEPA School of Social Science and Humanities on their Alumni page.

I selected seven applicants from the responses I received, and I interviewed them informally in a cafe. I had a number of criteria based on their interest in gender issues, previous interpretation and translation experience, working hour flexibility, fluency in English and Nepali and their personality. My interpreters were also recruited on their ability to listen, be personable, flexible, empathic and confident. They were paid well, but I also saw this as an opportunity for someone who wanted to further their career in this field. By mutually benefitting from the relationship, I hoped we would consequently work well as a team.

I found a suitable candidate, Prapti who was not available until mid-September 2013; until Prapti started, a friend of mine, Prashamsa, was able to interpret for me. After returning back to Nepal in March 2014, for the second part of the fieldwork, I found that Prapti had been offered a more permanent job elsewhere. However, another contact, recommended a freelance research assistant called Kamana. Throughout the duration of the fieldwork, Arya worked with me during her free time. I also recruited a friend, Prasiit, to translate focus groups and interviews in Newari[32]. At varying points during the fieldwork

[32] Most people in Kathmandu speak Nepali, but there are some, especially within the older generation, who only speak Newari. Newari is the historic language of the Newar caste; Newari people are indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley and its surrounding areas. Subsequently, during four interviews and two of the focus groups we sought help from a Newari speaker. I could have possibly hired a Newari speaking interpreter, however upon organising interviews and focus groups gatekeepers assured me that the participants could speak Nepali. Newari interviews and focus groups were subsequently translated and transcribed by Prasiit.

Arya, Prashamsa, Kamana and Prapti were involved in translation and interpretation; Prasiit was only involved in the translation of Newari interviews and focus groups. Having a team of five was necessary given the volume of research undertaken, time pressures associated with my visa and flexibility I required (see below also).

Given the centrality of my interpreters to this work it is important to *write in* their positionality. All of my interpreters were young, female, unmarried and had an interest in 'development' issues in Nepal. Due to the sensitive nature of the work, and the fact that many Nepali women are uncomfortable talking about more personal experiences in front of men, I thought it was more appropriate to employ a female interpreter. I also felt it would generally be better to have an interpreter who was unmarried. I feel that my interpreters, and my own, personal distance from marriage and widowhood meant that we were able to position ourselves as 'active learners'. Further to this, my interpreters were all Brahmans, although they did not outwardly display or reveal their caste sometimes participants asked their surname from which they could deduce their caste status. My interpreters were also highly educated: they all had master's degrees and were fluent in English. While this and their caste could have potentially intimated participants, from my perspective, they were humble and treated everyone, regardless of their background or caste, with compassion and respect.

My interpreters were also employed as research assistants. For instance they helped me to organise research appointments (as I could not understand Nepali easily on the phone), they advised me on appropriate questions and wording, they taught me Nepali phrases, they ensured that I did not get over-charged when buying research materials and they also became my friends. The dependence I had on Kamana, Prapti, Arya and Prashamsa for helping to me communicate with participants, mean that their role was fundamental. Considering their vital role, interpreters and research assistants in many ways 'co-

produce' the research with the researcher. Each interpreter, given their dual position as both insider and outsider, also bridges an important space between the researcher and the participants. Our relationship and dynamic as a team shaped the trajectory of this work and also the relationships we built with widowed participants and their families. Given this, it is surprising that the integral role of research assistants has been so poorly integrated into methodologies and wider analysis; "research assistants have long been central to ethnographic practice, yet the conventions of academic labor have left their roles under-stated and obscure" (Middleton and Cons, 2014: 279, see also Turner, 2010).

All of the research assistants were central to the research, however as a result of Arya's long standing involvement, since 2010, she is fundamental to the ethnographic and long-term engagement I have with Nepal and Nepali widows. Arya and I have, throughout our friendship, discussed issues associated with widowhood and gender relations over cups of *chiya* (tea) at length. I have asked for her guidance and she has openly given her advice. Not only has she helped me in terms of the research itself, but she also helped me to settle into Nepal and welcomed me into her family. I have enjoyed festivals and long evenings talking to her family over her mother's *dahl bhat*[33]; we have gone on trips with orphaned children whom her family supports and to her ancestral home in Southern Nepal. We have worked together exploring ways in which I can support widowed women with the money fundraised, and of course conducted research together. In these experiences, not only have I leant more about Nepal and its culture, but we have also developed a strong bond together. My relationship with Arya and her family, reflects the fluid nature of 'the field'.

Similarly, over her time living in London from 2010 to 2011 I have helped her 'settle in' and advised her where possible. I hope the experience she has gained being my research assistant will help her

[33] Traditional Nepali meal consisting of rice, dahl, curry and chutney.

when she starts her own doctoral research and I also hope we can co-author papers together. I will give Arya as much help, guidance and advice as I can offer, but I doubt I will ever feel I have fully 'repaid' her. In these ways, it is difficult to draw the line between our friendship and our working relationship. Arya is very much a co-creator of my work on widowhood and as Holmberg (2014: 322) asserts "much more than an assistant".

Navigating Translation: Interpretation, Translation and Language

Given that all interviews, oral histories and focus groups involved interpretation and translation, it is important to illustrate some of the associated difficulties. Compared to English there are "significantly fewer words in Nepali" (AFN[34]: 22.09.13). Importantly for this research was that there was no direct translation for key terms like well-being. Although the term well-being is familiar to development practitioners and those who were proficient in English, most Nepali people were not acquainted with it. Taking advice from my translators, I thought it was best to use the term 'good life' *(rammro jiban)*. Conceptually I was aware that 'good life' was not necessarily synonymous with well-being, nonetheless this was the best alternative. As evident in *Appendix 3* I asked participants 'what a good life meant to them' most participants understood this, but where necessary I subsequently asked them 'what do you need for a good life'. Although there was no translation of the term well-being, asking participants about a 'good life' worked as an alternative and participants understood this and responded well to these questions. Furthermore, there are "fewer adjectives to describe feelings or experiences" (AFN: 25.09.13). For example, I would ask participants after they described an incident or experience, "how did that make you feel". They would often reply with *"rammro cha* (good)*"* or *"rammro chaina* (bad)*"*; given this I often had to ask further follow up questions to establish in what way something was 'good' or 'bad'.

[34] AFN stands for authors field notes and will be referenced as such throughout.

Through my past research engagements, I was aware that in Nepali, intonation, body language and mannerisms are as important as the specific word used (Limbu et al., 2013).

There was also the issue of the process of translation itself. During research engagements, the participant would answer the question and talk for some time, the interpreter would then summarise what was said and then I would think of the next appropriate question. Although the exact translation would be available at a later date in the written transcript[35], I did miss some specific subtleties and nuances, and thus was unable to ask follow up questions on these, as the interpreter was unable to summarise everything (see Bujra, 2006).

Ultimately, they were doing exactly what was asked of them and it would have been impossible for them to interpret the entire dialogue. Furthermore if they had interpreted everything said, the interview would be very long, the flow would be disrupted and the participants would have potentially become disinterested. Women had to be patient while waiting for the respective information to be interpreted; I was conscious of the fact that they had kindly offered their time and I did not want them to feel bored and disengaged. As such, we kept the translation from Nepali to English short, which maintained the flow of the interview and held the participant's attention. Further, as my Nepali improved, I was able to ask most of the initial questions and understood more of what the participants were saying, so there was less need for interpretation.

The time-lag between interviews and receiving transcripts was another issue. I had four interpreters working with me over the course of the fieldwork. As mentioned Prasiit translated interviews and focus groups

[35] I could and did, in some cases, re-interview or conduct an oral history with participants when I had the full transcript; nevertheless, this was neither always practical nor possible to do so.

from Newari to English, but he was not involved in interpreting. I had decided it would be best for the interpreter who conducted the interview to do the transcription - given their familiarity with the interview. I designated time and days off fieldwork for the interpreters to transcribe. While they were working on this, I would be doing other research related activities such as conducting key informant interviews, visiting organisations, writing up my field notes and purchasing research materials. In spite of this, at times, I found that the workload was too much for them. Consequently, I asked the others, who were not involved with fieldwork and interpreting at the time, to translate and transcribe the interviews. This meant that the lag time between interviews and receiving transcripts reduced, allowing me to re-interview participants before I left Nepal.

It could be argued that the coherency and consistency between the transcripts might have been affected by the fact that five different translators were involved. To avoid this I asked the translators to follow a certain format and I provided an example of this (see *Appendix 8*). Differences within the process of translation itself were evidently more difficult to negotiate. However, as interpretation and translation are inherently subjective, even if I had used only one translator the resultant outputs would have been skewed to their own individual interpretation.

It is also important to consider the power geometries between the researcher, translator, participants and language into which the research is translated. Temple and Young (2004: 164) maintain:

> "The relationships between languages and researchers, translators and the people they seek to represent are as crucial as issues of which word is best in a sentence in a language".

English is often favoured over other languages; this perpetuates its legitimacy over 'native' languages, maintaining the power hierarchies

between languages and cultures (Spivak, 1992). Since this research has to be read and understood in English, in order for it to make sense in English, the exact meaning in Nepali could be lost and the participants' narratives potentially mis-interpreted (see also Bujra, 2006). I remain aware that writing this in English is reinforcing its 'legitimacy' and dominance as a language; then again breaking out of this expected norm is difficult. The format of the research and my association with a British institution meant that it would not be possible to conduct this doctoral research in Nepali. However, what is more important perhaps is the way in which these issues and their resultant effects are written, or not written, into the research. Further, upon completion of this thesis, I will produce a shorter document in Nepali for the benefit of the organisations I worked with, and this will provide an opportunity for the translators I worked with to be co-authors.

OVERCOMING METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

While the methodological tools were appropriate for this research, there were some conceptual, cultural and practical challenges. Conceptually, there was some disparity between the methods and theories deployed, this issue was not specific to a particular method, but transcended them all. Translating the theoretical framework into appropriate questions was difficult, and language barriers and translation intensified this. For example, initially I had decided to use a list (see *Appendix 3*) of things needed for a 'good life' and I asked participants to add anything they felt I had missed. This worked well with some participants and they enjoyed this type of engagement. Giving a list to participants was, on the one hand, a positive way of prompting those who were less forthcoming and helpful in encouraging further discussion; yet, on the other, it could have directed them too much such that aspects of well-being could have been overlooked that were not on the list. In turn, what was perhaps more significant was not the list of dimensions itself, but understanding why and how these

elements were important. Given this, towards the end of the first fieldwork period and during the second period I asked participants to list three things they felt they needed for a 'good life' and why they had specifically listed those. Shortening the ranking exercise also helped to make time for new questions in the second phase of research (see above and *Appendix 4*).

During the first trip, my initial questions concerning agency were more direct (see *Appendix 3*). Some women found these difficult perhaps because they did not talk or think about such topics explicitly through their daily lives (see Jha and White, 2016). With successive interviews, my ability to ask questions on agency and to identify agential capacity improved. However, I found that questions related to agency still needed a more specific line of inquiry and that my initial strategy was not focused enough (see Jha and White, 2016). I realised that the focus should be explicitly on gendered cultural practices as it is something familiar to all Nepali women, and especially widows. As a result, towards the end of the first fieldwork trip I started asking questions on gendered practices (see *Appendix 4*).

Being in the field allowed me to connect theory and the lived experiences of widowhood more acutely, reiterating the value of practical engagements, and how they cannot be substituted by remote theoretical engagement. These alterations further stress the embedded nature of this work, in that the direction organically shifted according to the emanating material.

There were some cultural issues associated with the methods adopted. Given the topics of interest and the qualitative methodological triangulation, there were a significant number of open and subjective questions. Through my past research experiences, I became aware that participants could be uncomfortable when asked subjective questions and were, at times, anxious about giving 'correct' answers. In a bid to

address this, at the start of the interview, I allowed time for general conversation, where we could get to know one another. This relaxed participants. Second, I positioned the closed and simpler questions at the start of the interviews, easing participants into the more open questions. Third I reiterated that there were no 'correct' answers and encouraged participants to speak from 'the heart'.

Related to this was the general issue of expression. Some participants found it difficult to engage in more creative activities associated with PAR, such as drawing pictures and maps. I was aware that those who only had a basic education would be unfamiliar and uncomfortable using a pen. However, I did not anticipate those who were literate would be averse to drawing. Due to this, some of the activities based on artwork were not particularly effective, and when constructing problem trees and solution charts participants had to tell my interpreter or I what to write. The exercise that involved ranking pictures was much more effective as it did not require reading or writing.

The main practical issue was time. With the pressures of child rearing, family responsibilities and employment Nepali women are often very busy, therefore, there were limited opportunities to arrange research engagements with some participants. Saturday[36] is the only day of the weekend in Nepal meaning that it was often the only day that some participants could meet. Consequently, I had to be particularly organised as I only had so many 'Saturdays' during my time there. As it is not a cultural norm to meet in the evening I also had to complete my fieldwork before sunset. Related to this, many of the key informants were also incredibly busy which meant that they had limited time to participate. On occasion they were late, and sometimes, when I arrived at an interview, some said they only now had half the intended time. This was particularly challenging since the questions I had prepared

[36] Saturday is the traditional holy day and the working week starts on a Sunday. "Most Government and national organisations only have one day off whilst more international organisations have a day off on a Saturday and Sunday" (AFN: 11.09.13).

reflected the length of time I had anticipated, so I cut questions and readjusted the interview. In addition, the qualitative methods deployed were inherently time consuming, and more so as a result of the interpretation required; other factors such as traffic jams, political strikes[37], periodic illness and the seemingly never ending public holidays aggravated these time pressures.

Other practical issues emerged in focus groups as often too many participants often turned up, which sometimes made it difficult to control the group and afford everyone an opportunity to speak. Furthermore, having a group that was too large made the interpretation particularly arduous (see Bujra, 2006). Although focus groups were relatively successful, given these practical issues, and the fact that I was able to gain more insight into widowhood through more individual interactions, I decided to focus on oral histories and semi-structured interviews during the second fieldwork period.

SENSITIVITY, 'SISTERS' AND 'SURVIVAL'

Sensitivity and Anonymity

The primary concern prior to and during the research was to work ethically and sensitively to protect participants. At the outset of the interview, participants were made aware of the research process and were also assured that they were not obliged to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with (see *Appendix 9, 10, 11* and *12* for

[37] Due to the political instability in Nepal there were frequent political strikes. These strikes were commonly called by the Maoist party and affected transportation and services. At the time of the election in November 2013 the strikes were particularly bad, there was a seven-day long transport strike and the Maoists threatened to, and subsequently did, attack and bomb vehicles that travelled. As I was responsible for my interpreter, I felt it was only safe to interview participants within walking distance and this therefore hindered progress.

relevant information sheets). My interpreters read a consent form[38] (see *Appendix 13*) and the participant agreed, disagreed and/or asked any questions. During the actual interview, if participants were visibly distressed they were asked if they wanted to pause, change the subject or to stop the interview.

Participants were assigned a code number and their names and personal details were encrypted and stored separately on my laptop. I have one hard drive with the interview recordings on it in a locked drawer and my supervisor has another as a backup. As stated in the ethics agreement all information was kept confidential at all times, and the information was only accessible to my interpreters and I. My interpreters signed a confidentiality agreement prior to commencing work.

All participants were told that they would remain anonymous and pseudonyms would be used. This is the general expectation at most Universities and research councils, such that it is potentially difficult to make a case and get ethical approval for research that does not anonymise participants. Given this, I previously agreed with the QMUL ethics committee that all participants would remain anonymous. However, during the research I found that many women were proud to share their story and this involved using their own name. I explained that it was part of the University procedure and I had to comply, and participants were supportive of this. Nevertheless this does raise questions about the appropriateness of ethics procedures and whether decisions concerning anonymity should remain with the individual participant and discussed at the point of research. Moreover, personally I found it difficult to use pseudonyms during the write up phase. I had changed the names of the women before I started writing the empirical chapters. This was a mistake as my participants felt like strangers and I

[38] Due to issues concerning illiteracy, it was more appropriate to gain verbal consent, as it could be embarrassing and uncomfortable for participants to be asked to sign a written consent form.

felt disconnected from them. Therefore, I changed the names back to the originals until the thesis was completed.

Given the intersectional motivations of this thesis, I wanted participants to be identified with their age, age when widowed and their caste. As it will be discussed in *Chapter 4*, these social identities were identified as being the most important, and illustrating these identities was critical in helping to further contextualise experiences of widowhood. However it could be argued that although pseudonyms were used, participants could still be identified as a consequence of their age, age when widowed, caste and their photograph. While this may be the case, participants were aware of what would and would not be used prior to participating in this research and how this research may be used in the future. Furthermore, each individual was asked for their permission before the photograph was taken. By agreeing to participate in this research, participants would have also simultaneously considered if they were at any risk, and if their confidentiality could be breached. I trust that the participants themselves are best equipped to decide if this research may have put them at any risk. However, during the subsequent dissemination of this research and further articles that may come from it, I will consider their anonymity on a case-by-case basis. I think this is the most appropriate strategy to effectively protect their anonymity. It is the papers and articles directed at the Nepali public that could possibly, although I do not think it is likely, expose the identities of participants. Within these documents I will not give the location of the participant in the Kathmandu Valley but rather describe the area as appropriate; for example, a rural area, a traditionally Newari area or a central urban area; and of course I will use a pseudonym rather than their real name. I will also consider whether it is appropriate to use photographs in these incidences.

Globally, widowhood is a sensitive topic and this sensitivity is exacerbated in a country like Nepal where the resultant discrimination

can result in abuse and violence. Unsurprisingly there were reported cases of mental, physical and sexual abuse, three women we interviewed disclosed that they had been raped, while another reported that her daughter had been trafficked. Many others spoke about physical abuse from their late husband, their husband's family members and even their own children (see also Kiani, 2014; Sabri et al., 2016).

Information and details about these difficult experiences were disclosed voluntarily. In some cases women used gestures to explain how they had been abused; perhaps they did not want others to hear or felt uncomfortable saying it aloud. As hard as it was, it was not my decision to report such incidences. It was up to the women to do what they saw fit, and as such I did what was within my capacity to help; by providing emotional support, letting participants control the conversation, suggesting that they should report it and asking if they would like me to put them in touch with an organisation that could help.

After years of working with widows, in some respects, I have found ways of coping with hearing sad and distressing stories. Yet, there were evidently still times when my interpreters and I got emotional - on two occasions my interpreters had to stop the interview, I frequently cried and on one occasion I had to leave the room. In these situations I comforted my interpreters and asked if they wanted to stop, change the subject or take a break. The relaxed nature of the interview allowed emotion - by all parties - to be expressed comfortably and in doing so it did not appear 'unprofessional' (Jones and Ficklin, 2012). I believe that this empathy was an integral part of building trust and developing relationships with participants.

Experiences of widowhood are not monolithic; not all of these women were grieving, nor were they all discriminated against. Some women

deemed themselves happier compared to when they were married, while others were widowed so long ago that they were no longer grieving (see *Chapter 4*). Furthermore, upon disclosing distressing experiences and talking about their grief, some women did not seem outwardly upset or emotional; perhaps remaining positive was their coping mechanism or they had become numb to their grief. Whilst many participants were undoubtedly upset, my memories of research interactions are also filled with laughter and fun. This illustrates the varying ways in which people deal with distressing circumstances, and the varying experiences of widowhood more broadly.

Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld as much as possible, but there were points, for example when interviewing in public spaces, when this was not possible. While interviewing and gathering oral histories, members of the public became aware that the participant was engaging in research, and in some cases women could potentially have been overheard. This was difficult to avoid as there were times when it was too hot, cold or there was not sufficient seating space to sit in a private area. In other situations, when we were in a private room, family and friends of the participant came to listen. When this happened we asked if the participant was comfortable with this, and generally it seemed that they were. Given the centrality of relationships and the way in which space is publically shared in Nepal, I feel that women were "not always nesscessarily concerned about absolute privacy as compared to people in the UK" (AFN: 14.11.13). Furthermore, "having friends or family members there often appeared to be comforting" (AFN: 02.10.13). In some interviews leaders of widows' groups were also present, and participants seemed reassured to be in the company of someone who understood the issues they faced (AFN: 2.10.13).

Similarly, because focus groups involved more than one person it was difficult to ensure absolute confidentiality. Thus to uphold

confidentality as much as possible we stressed the importance of sharing within a safe and comfortable space. It should also be noted that most of the women who participated in focus groups were members of WHR and were already familiar with meeting together and talking about these issues. It was hoped that their group cohesion would facilitate the maintenance of each other's confidentiality. The presence of a WHR representative also helped to maintain confidentiality as she reiterated the importance of privacy.

'Sisters': Personal and Professional Relationships

Drawing upon Patty Kelly's (2008) research, Laliberté and Schurr (2016: 73) illustrate how it was her emotions and relationships that fuelled her fieldwork:

> "It is emotions that deliver Patty Kelly to her field site and that shape her relationships in the field. Friendships, and the feelings of trust associated with them, are crucial to shaping her access to the Galactic Zone and her knowledge of women's and men's everyday lives within that space."

Akin to Kelly's (2008) fieldwork, it was empathy that drove me to this research, and emotions and relationships were central to it (see Jones and Ficklin, 2012). Emotions are not experienced individually nor do they occur within a vacuum, as such it is fundamental, especially within feminist practice, to write them in.

In Nepal, people refer to each other through familial relations. For example, people will call the bus driver 'little brother' *(bhai)* or 'big brother' *(dai)* even when he is not related to them or they have never met before. In a shop, a customer may refer to the shopkeeper as 'father' *(baa)*, 'big sister' *(didi)* or 'little sister' *(bahini)*. How people refer to each other is dependent on the relative age of the other person.

Consequently, I fondly refer to my participants as my *'didis'* and they refer to me as *'bahini'*, although sadly of these women are younger than me and therefore I am their *'didi'*. This cultural norm also highlights the centrality of relationships and family within Nepal.

My participants showed me kindness, love and friendship, and some of them became a big part of my life - as I did theirs. They invited me to social events, festivals, to stay the night and to lunch or tea. I enjoyed these engagements immensely, but they were also valuable for ethnographic purposes as they gave me a deeper insight into their everyday lives. As mentioned, taking the attention away from widowhood specifically revealed interesting information and these engagements were also fundamental in building strong relationships.

What I find most difficult is the fact that these women are unlikely to ever be able to visit me and thus the onus is with me to visit them. Jokes were made about taking them in my *'jhola'* (bag) back to London, but we were all aware that this was unlikely to happen. Consequently, I tried not to make any promises I could not keep. I told them I would visit them once I had written my thesis and I was not sure when that would be. Since my return I have been in contact with some participants, and after the earthquake I have been in touch with them more frequently.

In exchange for their participation, women were given a gift of a small purse. I wanted to give participants something useful, but also something that they could remember the research engagement by. On some occasions women had given up half or a whole day to engage in interviews or help me to find further participants. I tried as much as possible to arrange this on a Saturday, yet this was not always possible. Where I could I tried to give participants some money to cover the cost of their lost employment, but as many of these women were now my friends they were reluctant to take it. To counter this I would buy

something from their shop, or if they had a sewing shop I would ask them to fix (I somehow always had holes in my clothes) or make something for me. This way I could subtly and sensitively repay them. Before I left, I went to visit the women with a larger gift, for example a framed photo of their family, a scarf or some slippers. In a few cases I took women out for something to eat and took their children to the zoo.

There is much debate within development geography surrounding 'appropriate' payment and compensation for participants (Hammett and Sporton, 2012). I felt that my repayment strategy was sensitive to the local culture and the varying financial situations of research participants. There were a number of reasons why I chose to do this. Nepali people generally work six days a week and long hours, and there is little distinction between work and recreational time in Nepali culture. Due to this, compensation for participation is not as expected in the same way as it is in the 'West'. Furthermore, from my previous experience, I knew that participants would perhaps want to give something to me in return[39]. Thus giving them monetary payment could have put further pressure on them to feel they needed to give me a larger gift. Furthermore, although generally an economically poor country, there are many Nepali people who do not struggle financially and people could have been offended if I had given them money. Due to the differences in income, it would have been difficult to find a suitable amount to give to everyone which would not offend more well off participants by giving too little, but would not risk incentivising poorer women based on the financial reward.

Yet, on a few occasions some participants, who seemed to be struggling financially, expected more repayment from their engagement. To support them I asked if I could buy their family rice or something they

[39] In Nepali culture there is a common phrase which translates as '*guests are god*', so when guests, and especially foreign guests, go to the home of a Nepali they are often treated that way. During research engagements I was nearly always given tea and snacks, however sometimes participants gave me jewellery, clothing or something they had made themselves.

needed for the house. I also put them in touch with organisations that could help and ensured they had the means to contact them. I understood the complex situations and dependency that could occur if I was to support them beyond this. In response to such requests I also explained that I planned to support a group of widows in the district of Nuwakot, North West of the Kathmandu Valley.

Prior to, and during fieldwork I explored the possibilities for supporting widows through the funds raised with MUTU Nepal. I worked with WHR to find a way I could support women with a foundation that would act as a means by which they support each other collectively as a group. After much discussion they agreed that they wanted me to support them in building an office and meeting room; at the time they were renting a tiny office and had no furniture. For various reasons I was unable to send the funds across, and within that time the earthquake hit and many of the women's homes were destroyed. Consequently, I have transferred the money to provide blankets, homeware and other materials to women who lost their homes. In this way, I feel that I have been able to give something back to widowed women even though it was not to my participants directly. I explained my intentions to participants about supporting the WHR group in Nuwakot – although I was unsure of exactly how I would be helping at that time – and most indicated that they were happy that the group were receiving support.

I feel my strategy for compensation generally worked well and I showed my gratitude to participants for their involvement appropriately. I soon realised that the best tokens of my appreciation were actually not material or monetary. Spending time together, keeping promises, listening to participants experiences and trying my best to translate this work into positive social change for widowed women were highly valued by participants. They too were grateful to my interpreters and I – participants explained how they felt happy that someone had taken time to listen to them, while others stated how they

felt more relaxed and were encouraged by our supportive words (see also Dickson-Swift et al., 2006; Johnson, 2009). This exemplifies the collaborative nature of this research, the reciprocity upon which it was based, and the personal relationships it engendered.

Dust, Crows And 'Surviving' Kathmandu

As Sharp and Dowler (2011: 154) maintain, "the significance of the embodied challenges of the field (often physically and emotionally at the time) is often silenced in the written and presented accounts of methodology". Since then there has been a growing interested in the personal experience of the researcher and emotions within the field (Laliberté and Schurr, 2016). With this respect, the researcher and the research are not disassociated but entangled together, and therefore the well-being of the research team is integral to the success of the research more broadly. As such, it is therefore vital to illustrate my personal and emotional journey.

Fieldwork was mentally and physically exhausting. Kathmandu is the second most polluted[40] city in the world (Lodge, 2014); each time I land there I wonder how I will cope with it. The traffic, heat, altitude, lack of pavements, cramped transport, cultural differences and my 'foreignness', which often elicited much intrigue, also made daily life tiring. This was heightened by frequent bouts of illness. Most of the time these were minor, but on two occasions I was hospitalised. I was also anxious about the potentially devastating earthquake that was anticipated to happen sometime within that decade. To put myself at ease I made an evacuation plan with my flat-mate and carried a small 'survival' kit consisting of a whistle, a torch, phone numbers and some medicine. Eventually I learnt to live with the threat and took comfort in

[40] The lack of employment opportunities in rural areas has forced people to migrate to the capital and this has accelerated the dust and pollution. Kathmandu's 'geographical' situation within a valley creates a hospitable home for pollution and dust.

the fact that I had done all I could to prepare for it; the anticipated earthquake actually occurred exactly a year after my fieldwork.

The other significant frustration was the daily harassment stemming from my identity as a young, white female. Most of the time these were harmless comments that I could easily brush or laugh off, I also learnt phrases to respond to them. Generally this worked as men were shocked that a white woman could understand and speak Nepali, and that a woman could talk back to them. I also wore appropriate clothing to minimise any attention, however, on two occasions, such advances were more serious and I was for some time angry and frightened. The exhaustion and difficulties of living in Kathmandu were at times exacerbated by emotion and frustration from the fieldwork itself. Some participants disclosed horrifying personal experiences and others were clearly struggling to cope with life, and as an empathetic and emotional person I found this difficult.

Living in Kathmandu and undertaking fieldwork was emotionally and physically demanding. Kathmandu and London are incredibly different places and have different speeds, but when I adjusted, taking things slower than my usual London pace, I found peace and happiness. I enjoyed my fieldwork immensely and reflect on it fondly. I loved spending time with participants, speaking Nepali and learning more about the culture. I enjoyed the challenges of Kathmandu and learning how to navigate the city. My frustration and tiredness was always superseded by something wonderful and positive. For me that was the smell of incense in the morning, the afternoon shade in the narrow streets of Ason and the deafening noise of the crows at dusk.

ANALYSING EMBEDDED EXPERIENCES OF WIDOWHOOD

It is also important to detail the process of analysis. I undertook a thematic analysis of the interviews, oral histories, focus groups and field diary extracts. There were a number of stages to this analysis. First, the interviews, histories and focus groups were translated and transcribed by my interpreters; much of this work was completed before I left Nepal. My translators tried to find the direct translation into English, however, at times there was no direct translation or what was said would not make sense in English. Furthermore, as explained above there are generally fewer words, especially adjectives, in Nepali as compared to English. To account for this, the translators wrote notes within the text to explain what they meant or give greater meaning through the intonation the participant had used (see *Appendix 8*). I transcribed the notes taken from the key informant interviews and my field diary.

Second, when I completed the fieldwork, I read through all of the transcripts and field notes. Spending time familiarising myself with the transcripts was particularly important, given the fact I had not transcribed the interviews, oral histories and focus groups myself. As I read through them, I also looked at photographs and read my field diary. This aided my memory of the research engagement and 'transported' me back to a respondent's front porch, living room or bedroom.

The third stage involved thematically analysing the data through Nvivo. Given the number of interviews and the amount of coding that was required I felt it was most effective to use a software package to undertake this analysis. After speaking to my supervisors and colleagues about possible options, I decided to use Nvivo. The process of analysis actually started in the period between my field visits in London when I completed a two-day Nvivo course. By the end of this

course, I was competent with using the software and I carried out some preliminary analysis that helped me to establish what avenues of exploration to pursue in the second phase of research, and also helped me to develop the thematic codes that were used for the final stage of analysis. Initially, I analysed the data using broad codes. Over time, as I became more familiar with the research material, I identified further sub-codes within these more expansive main codes. For example, under the main well-being code I identified further sub-codes of material, relational and perceptual well-being. Where appropriate I made additional nodes within these sub-nodes. For instance, within relational well-being I found further categories of family and friends. Consequently, analysis involved layers of coding, starting with a 'broad-brush' coding to loosely organise the material and moving on to more detailed coding.

Fourth, I added my own notes and explanations to interpret the data from photographs and my field diary. I subsequently made connections between the themes and developed mind maps to illustrate these. This was also particularly useful in gaining an overall picture of the research findings. I made a table detailing all of the participants' demographic data (see *Appendix 1*) and conducted some basic analysis, for example, I produced graphs detailing the age range, educational attainment, caste and ethnicity backgrounds of participants. I then made an infographic to give a snapshot of this data (see *Chapter 4*). Throughout the analysis I reflected on the conceptual grounding of this research and sought to relate my findings back to these debates. Although I used the theories and themes as guides, I wanted the analysis to be predominantly directed by the emerging material and the experiences of widowed women. This process highlighted that while some findings reinforced existing knowledge associated with widowhood, other material formed the basis of new theorisations.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has delineated my methodological approach. I first explained the feminist and participatory methodology, and how this approach was integral in building relationships, focusing on collaboration and paying tribute to the subjective individual and the sensitive nature of the topic. I then detailed the triangulated methods and how they supported the overall methodological approach. Following this I detailed how this design was mobilised. The methodological and personal challenges of this research were illustrated, and particular attention was paid to interpretation and translation. Finally, the process of analysis was delineated.

CHAPTER 4

RE-IMAGINING WIDOWHOOD IN NEPAL THROUGH AN INTERSECTIONAL LIFE-COURSE APPROACH

> *"Firstly I am disabled, secondly I am a single woman (widow), and thirdly a woman so it is like a three dimensional discrimination and then there are other factors like society, values and norms… so it is like multiple discrimination" Ambika (35, 25, Brahman)*[41]

Ambika had a happy childhood in town of Biratngar close to the Indian border. However, while at secondary school she developed bone cancer and the lower half of her leg had to be amputated to save her life. After completing her secondary education, she moved to Kathmandu to study law at University. She married her husband, Muneshwor Pandey, in 2002 and their son was born soon after they married. Muneshwor died two years later of pneumonia, leaving her widowed at the age of 25. As traditionally prescribed, Ambika and her son continued to live with her parent's in-law, but soon after Muneshwor's death, they started to bully her and blame her for his death. Finding it difficult to continue to live with her in-laws under such circumstances, Ambika moved into rental accommodation where she lived with her mother and son. At the time when I met her, she was the President of Nepal Disabled Women's Association (NDWA), whilst also studying for a postgraduate degree in Sociology. When asked, Ambika said she identified herself as a *"social worker, a change agent, a woman and a human rights activist"* (see *Figure 4.1*).

Ambika's 'story' is an appropriate introduction to this chapter as it illustrates multiple interlocking identities relating to gender, caste, disability, age, marital and caste status and educational qualifications, as well as different stages in her life-course. At first glance, the intersections of her disability, gender, widowed status at a young age and being a single mother reflect the hardships that she has endured.

[41] Participants are identified by pseudonyms, their age at the time of the interview, age when widowed and caste status.

However on closer investigation, through her 'high' caste status, class, educational achievements, disability and gender Ambika had been able to carve out a successful career for herself as a social activist working for the rights of disabled women, which had in turn enabled her to live independently. Thus, whilst Ambika's social identities contributed towards her *marginalisation*, they also brought certain *privileges* (see *Chapter 2* and Nash, 2008).

Figure 4.1: Ambika pictured at the NDWA office in Kalopul

(Source: researcher's own photograph, Kalopul, September 2013)

In this chapter, I unpack widows' complex intersectional social identities and life-course stages to interrogate the ways in which these shape the diverse, everyday experiences of widowhood. I begin by providing a broad overview of the participants' social identities, contextualising these within the specificities of contemporary Nepali society. I then focus specifically on caste, religion, age, ageing and life-course - given their particular salience in shaping widowhood. With reference to caste, I detail how caste identities play a part in constructing the lived realities of widowhood, paying specific attention to the unique position of Newari widows. Furthermore, through the exploration of caste I also trace the ways in which religion shapes widowhood. In terms of age, I explore the myriad ways in which a woman's age influences widowhood and trace the complexity of ageing, and how becoming widowed can in fact induce feelings of 'regressive ageing'. Furthermore, instead of focusing solely on the period of widowhood, a woman's life-course, history and other life experiences that shape her current situation are addressed. Notably, and relating back to Ambika's life story, this chapter illustrates the diverse ways social identities contribute to both *oppression* and *privilege*.

DOCUMENTING THE HETEROGENEITY OF WIDOWS IN NEPAL

The widowed women who participated in this research were a highly heterogeneous and diverse group in terms of their age (both in relation to their age at the time of the interview and perhaps more importantly when widowed), caste, religion, employment status, property ownership, educational attainment and 'type' of marriage (see *Figure 4.2*). Prior to discussing these at greater length, it is instructive to situate these within the broader context of Nepal's economic, social and cultural history.

The Constitution of 1990 established Nepal as a more inclusive state, recognising equality regardless of diversity along the lines of "religion, race, gender, caste, tribe or ideology" (Bennett, 2005: 7). However, this constitution retained some "contradictions and ambiguities" with on-going discrimination on the basis of gender, marital status, sexuality, caste, ethnicity and religion (ibid.). After the decade long civil war (1996-2006) and the successive governments, a new constitution was implemented in September 2015. Even while there has been some progress towards equality generally, *including gender equality*, gender inequality persists. For example, despite the implementation of a new constitution, women are not allowed "to pass citizenship to their children" such that a child whose mother is a Nepali national, but father is not, is *not* recognised as a Nepali national and is effectively stateless (Thapa, 2015).

This legal disparity derives at least in part from what might be termed traditional gendered practices grounded within a pervasive patriarchal structure. As illustrated in *Chapter 2*, women are deemed impure, and as a consequence of this there are various cultural practices that reinforce their 'inferior' and 'impure' position. The continuing practices of *chaupadi*[42], *dowry*[43] payments, and the practice of women moving into the patrilocal home upon marriage, perpetuate their inferior position. Brunson (2010) argues that Nepal's progress towards gender equality is restricted by this traditional kinship system, as parents' consequently think that investment in daughters will be "lost to other

[42] The *chaupadi* "tradition dictates that women must not enter their homes for up to seven nights during menstruation", instead they sleep outside in huts of animal sheds (Bonnett, 2014: 155). In less traditional households women are not permitted to enter the kitchen nor engage in religious worship. This practice is conducted on the basis that women are seen to be 'impure' during their periods and as such are not allowed to enter and 'pollute' the home.

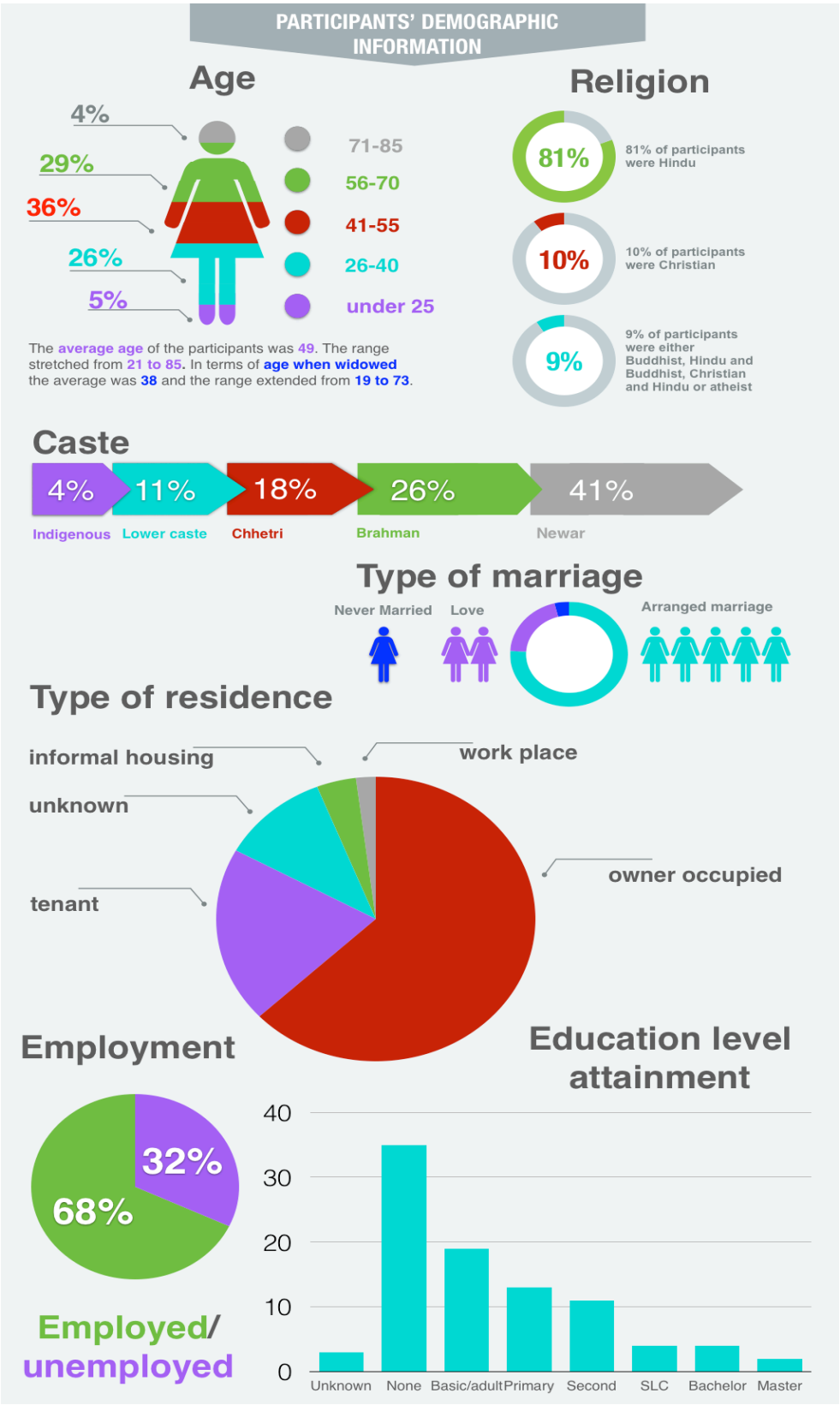
[43] A dowry is the transfer of money, goods or property from a woman's maternal home to her patrilocal home upon her marriage. While dowries are typically negotiated prior to marriage, disputes often arise resulting in physical, verbal and sexual abuse and violence long after the marriage itself. Given the financial burdens associated with dowry payment, girls born into poor families are often married at a young age, and often to much older men, to reduce the size of the payment (see also Bajracharya and Amin, 2012; Pradhan et al., 2011).

families" (Brunson, 2010: 94). In addition to this, distinct and rigid gendered roles compound such discrimination. Women's roles are primarily centred on child rearing and home making and men's are concerned with earning outside the home. However, in recent years there is increasing pressure for women to obtain employment outside the home *and* continue with their household responsibilities, culminating in a double burden of responsibility (Rustagi et al., 2013).

Evidently Nepali society continues to be shaped by a strong patriarchal structure with discriminatory practices towards women still evident. This said, there is an emerging consensus that there have been some incremental improvements in the status of women, which is partly attributable to the growth and strengthening of a civil society comprising of women and gender orientated NGOs (National Planning Commission, 2013). Furthermore, it is important to note that discriminatory gendered practices are continually being subverted, and that differences in gender equality vary according to social identities and across various spheres from household to state level (Nightingale, 2011).

Focusing more specifically on the intersections between gender and other cleavages of social identity within the specific context of widowed women, *Figure 4.2* documents key social, economic and cultural dynamics. While age, caste and life-course are unpacked at greater length below, my initial focus is on heterogeneity in terms of education, employment and property ownership.

Figure 4.2: Infographic of participants' demographics



(Source: researcher's data from interviews and oral histories)

Of the participants in this research, 38% could not read or write, and 21% only had basic education or had attended adult education classes. These figures are reflected in the 2011 national census which highlights the gendered dimension of educational access whereby 40% of females, as compared to 25% of males, over the age of five cannot read or write (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). It is evident then that gendered discrimination in relation to educational access starts at an early age. For example, if families can only afford to send one child to school, the son will often be sent and the daughter will work in the fields and within the home (Koolwal, 2007). Such discrimination stems from the fact that women marry into the patrilocal home, thus as mentioned above some parents think that their investment in daughters is 'wasted'.

Notwithstanding this, educational attainment among widowed women was varied and ranged from a significant number who had no/basic education, those who had attended adult literacy classes to others who had secondary education and had completed their school leaving certificate (SLC)[44] and university degrees. As evident in *Appendix 1* those with higher educational attainment tended to be younger reflecting increasing gender equality over the past decades. While no or lower levels of education were evident across all caste groups, this was particularly marked among 'lower' caste women, where only one woman who identified as such had secondary education, while the remainder had only basic or primary education.

Nepal is an economically poor country where 25.2% of popualtion live on less the $1.90 a day (World Bank Nepal, 2014), and on the Human Development Index (HDI) Nepal is ranked 147th poorest country globally (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Given Nepal's weak economy, finding secure and well-paid employment is

[44] The SLC is the final examination of secondary school in Nepal. Pupils must complete their SLC before joining higher secondary or intermediate level education.

difficult, and the unemployment and underemployment rate is high. Of the total population, 39% are under or unemployed (*KC, 2014), and of these,* 19.9% are unemployed (Centre Bureau of Statistics, 2008: 59). *While 7*0% of the workforce is employed in agriculture, agriculture only makes up one third of the GDP, reflecting the fact that agricultural work is not particularly profitable (Central Intelligence Agency, 2016). As a consequence of the lack of well-paid employment opportunities, many Nepalis are leaving to seek work abroad; Nepal's economy is heavily shaped by this emigration, as remittances from migrants make up 29% of its GDP (Central Intelligence Agency, 2016). Notably, of the total population 20.3%[45] are considered to be migrants; 56.9% are believed to be internal migrants while 43.1% travelled abroad (Sijapati, 2014: 16). This rate of outmigration is indicative of the weak economy and the lack of available jobs.

Of the participants in this research, 68% self-reported as being employed, as compared to the national average of 80.1% (Centre Bureau of Statistics, 2008: 59 and see *Figure 4.2*). This disparity is partly explained by the fact that the participants were widowed and thus generally older than the average working age population[46]. The types of employment reported varied according to formality and security. As illustrated in *Appendix 1* there was a range of occupations, including agricultural labourers, shopkeepers, bank clerks, construction workers, tailors, cleaners, teachers, sex workers, social workers and health volunteers. However, some of those who stated they were unemployed spoke of how they earned an income from renting out spare rooms or selling surplus vegetables and rice.

Property is an important capital asset in Nepal. The laws connected to the inheritance of property have changed in recent years; where once widowed women were only allowed to inherit their husband's property

[45] These statistics do not detail whether they include undocumented migrants.
[46] The official working age is 15 years old.

over the age of 35, they can now inherit their husbands' property at any age (WHR, 2016). People use their properties as shops and workspaces; they rent rooms out and use the surrounding land to rear animals or to grow vegetables and fruit. Furthermore, property is a critical means by which people can secure loans (Desai, 2012). From the 2011 census it appears that 45.5% of people in the Kathmandu Valley live in owner occupied properties, 52.6% live in rented accommodation and the remaining 1.9% live either in institutional housing or other sorts of property. Comparing this to the infographic, 63% of participants were living in owner occupied [47] accommodation and 20% in rented accommodation. Of the remaining participants, their living situation was either unknown, or they were living in an informal settlement or else at their workplace. The higher number of widowed women in this research who live in owner occupied properties is surprising given the disputes widowed women have with their in-laws about property, and the financial pressures they face which in turn mean many are forced to sell their property. This can perhaps be explained by snowballing strategy adopted in this work that meant that women who participated in this work tended to belong to a higher social class. Further to this, although there were 91 participants in this research, this is not necessarily representative of widowed women the Kathmandu Valley. .

This section has illustrated the heterogeneity of widowed women by exploring the demographic information of research participants. Widowed women varied considerably according to a number of social identities, including their educational attainment, property ownership and employment. Situating this data in the broader context of Nepali society has helped to contextualise it. However, within this heterogeneity there are some identities that are particularly significant in shaping widowhood; namely caste and religion, and age, ageing and life-course, which I focus on in turn.

[47] This data on property ownership only reflects the type of property women were living in and it does not detail who specifically owned the property.

CASTE AND RELIGION AMONGST WIDOWED WOMEN

As detailed in *Chapter 2*, caste, religion and ethnicity are inextricably interlinked. Nepal has a complex caste system comprising of "103 caste and ethnic groups". However, the caste structure can be crudely divided into those of Indo-Aryan origin and those of Tibeto-Burman origin (Pradhan and Shrestha, 2005: 2). Originally, people of Tibeto-Burman origin followed Buddhism and did not follow the caste system. However, as caste developed from being a Hindu religious practice to a social practice that pervaded everyday life, Tibeto-Burman people became incorporated into the caste system level (Lawoti, 2005). In terms of gender equality, there are commonly fewer restrictions for indigenous and 'lower' caste women since they have less ritual purity to lose (Enslin, 2014).

Chhetri is the largest caste group in Nepal, making up 16.6% of the population. Brahmans are the second largest (12.2%), followed by Magar (7.1%), Tharu (6.6%), Tamang (5.8%), Newar (5%) and the remaining population is made up of ethnic and 'lower' caste groups (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Given their number and 'higher' caste status, Brahmans, Chhetris and Newar largely dominate roles within Government and positions of authority (Routledge, 2010). Depending on the areas from which they originate, populations vary according to caste. Since Newari people are indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley, it is unsurprising that they made up the largest proportion in this research (41%) (see Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Of the remaining participants, 26% were Brahman, 18% were Chhetri, 11% self-identified as 'lower' caste and 4% were indigenous.

Related to caste is religion (Hangen, 2010). Although a secular country, Nepal is a predominantly Hindu as 81.34% of the population practice Hinduism (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014: d). Such 'secularism' is highly questionable in that the state continues to prioritise the

protection of religious *Hindu* practices (Haviland, 2014; Khatrya, 2016). Furthermore, the most recent constitution maintains that religious conversion is illegal and punishable by law; it is feared that because of this religious minorities will be further persecuted (ibid.). Reflecting the dominance of Hinduism within the state, Hindu festivals and practices also pervade everyday life, and many social events and gatherings are also Hindu cultural and religious engagements. In terms of this research, this is particularly significant, as 'religious' restrictions for widowed women are also arguably social and cultural restrictions. Notably Brahmans, Chettris and Newars predominantly follow Hinduism, and due to their religious beliefs, they tend to have to adhere to restrictions associated with widowhood. As they are the most orthodox Hindus and the 'purest' within the caste system, Brahmans tend to stick to restrictions most rigidly (Enslin, 2014; Lamb, 2000). Due to their religion, Christian and Buddhist widows do not have to adhere to such restrictions (see *Chapter 2).*

The religions within this research largely reflected those in the census, where 81% of the participants were Hindu, 10% were Christian, and the remaining 9% were either Buddhist, atheists, Buddhist and Hindu or Christian and Hindu (see *Figure 4.2*). The number of Christians included is higher than the national average at 1.41% (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014: d). This can be partly attributed to the fact that some participants were sourced through Feet Ministries, a Christian based organisation. Furthermore, the research was undertaken in the Kathmandu Valley which is a metropolitan area and where 'Western' influences in the form of missionaries and Christians based organisations are most evident. In addition, given the social discrimination and inequality related to marital status and caste, some widowed women and 'lower' caste people convert to Christianity to

seek refuge from such discrimination, while also receiving material, social and emotional support[48].

With this contextualisation, the next section explores how everyday realities for widowed women varied according to caste. The main contrasts identified were between those of 'higher' caste - Brahmans and Chhetris - and others groups including indigenous and 'lower' caste women. Participants particularly articulated the complicated experience for Newari widows. Furthermore, because, in Nepal, caste and religion are inextricably linked, the research found that the differences between women's experiences varied according to their religion.

Nirmala (57, 53 Brahman) from Mulpani, identified the varying experiences of widowed women according to 'higher' castes and indigenous castes:

> *"If you look at Tamang, Gurung, Magar (indigenous) women they have independence and they don't live under anyone's control. They marry one person and if they don't like it they move on and the society doesn't say anything. But in Brahman and Chhetri communities, they say it's better to take poison and die rather than marry again".*

Ambika (35, 25, Brahman) had a difficult relationship with her in-laws, perhaps as a consequence of the intersection between her 'high' caste, her widowed status at a young age and her disability. She similarly detailed the situation for widowed women according to caste:

> *"In the Rais and Limbus (indigenous) and other castes (not Brahman) even after the death of the son the daughter in law is treated well and cared for. If they find a suitable person they also remarry her".*

[48] Notably of the ten Christian widows involved in this research, four belonged to 'lower' caste groups. Three women had converted to Christianity upon widowhood, whereas the remaining seven had been Christian prior to widowhood.

Here Ambika and Nirmala were referring to the strict traditions widowed women within 'higher' caste groups – of which they were a part – were expected to abide by, as compared to the relative freedom given to women belonging to indigenous and 'lower' caste groups (see Drèze, 1992 and 1995; Lamb, 2000; Jensen, 2005; Mari Bhat, 1994). Related to this, the two women in this study who had remarried[49] were of 'lower caste'. This can be explained the fact that because 'higher' caste women have more ritual purity to lose, they have to adhere to the restrictions more acutely to maintain their purity. Although indigenous and lower castes also practiced Hinduism, women in this research spoke of their greater freedom as compared to 'higher' caste widows.

However, while participants generally spoke of the difficulties and restrictions for 'high' caste Hindu widows, some women also acknowledged the way in which pre-existing discrimination - on the basis of caste and religion - could compound the difficulties for 'lower' caste, non-Hindu and indigenous women (see Gesier, 2005). Jogmaya (40, 39, Brahman) worked in a cooperative in Bhaktapur and strongly resisted many of the restrictions expected of widowed women. She explained the particular difficulties for 'lower' caste widows because of their relative lack of education and consequent struggles to find employment. While class and caste are not synonymous, 'lower' caste, and religious minorities, were often less likely to have capital assets, and therefore faced greater financial problems and financial exclusion. This illustrates how the intersection of class, caste, religion, marital status and gender shaped women's lives.

Widowhood was particularly unique for women who may be discriminated against in the community, as a result of their peripheral and 'lower' caste position, but who benefitted from relatively greater

[49] Two of the participants had remarried. Both Rekha's husbands had passed away and Rekha was, at the time of interview, still widowed. Kanchi's first husband had mistreated her, she later separated and married again, but her second husband had died. Thus, none of the participants were remarried at the time of participation.

gender equality within the home (see *Chapter 2* and Geiser, 2005). This reiterates the ways in which the social identity of caste can contribute to both *marginalisation* and *privilege*. Although she did not engage with discriminatory practices associated with widowhood, due to her caste, and possibly her religious identity as a Christian, Rina (21, 19, Bika) told us of how she was discriminated in the public sphere:

> *"Well we Christians don't have to follow any rules about widowhood, but since I am still widowed and of a 'lower' caste people talk about me in the community."*

This highlights the difficulties Rina faced as a consequence of her gender, caste, marital status and religion. This supports Yadav's (2016) research which details although widowed from 'lower' caste and ethnic groups do not have to adhere to as many restrictions, such as wearing white sari's, they face other kinds of discrimination as a result of their widowhood and caste. However, it should be noted that although Rina did not have to follow restrictions associated with widowhood in her patrilocal home, we were told from another participant that she did have a difficult relationship with her mother in-law.

Related to this, Christian widows particularly explained how they were exempt from caste and religious related practices associated with widowhood. For example, they were not required to wear a *tika*, whether they were unmarried or married, as it was perceived as a Hindu tradition. Keshari (35, 25, Chhetri) who had been a Christian for over ten years reflected

> *"In Christianity there are no restrictions in clothes, but we can't put on tika. In Hindu religion, you cannot wear red or bangles, but it is not like that in Christian religion. Even those who are married do not wear tika. So it is same for married and widowed women."*

As Christians, these women were not expected to adhere to gendered cultural practices associated with widowhood or marriage, and seemed

relatively free to choose their clothes and adornment (Galvin, 2005). Participants explained that Christian and Buddhist widows also faced fewer restrictions when it came to remarrying, however none of the Buddhist or Christian women in this research had remarried[50]. This highlights that women were more comfortable resisting norms associated with adornment, but not those concerned with remarriage; this suggests that there was a hierarchy of restrictions (see *Chapter 6*). This also reiterates that though non-Hindu widows may personally reject many of the Hindu restrictions, due to the dominating Hindu culture, it is difficult to reject them all in practice.

There were diverging opinions related to the experience of Newari widows; some believed that they faced greater restrictions than 'high' caste Brahmans, whereas others stated the opposite. This disparity of perceptions perhaps reflects their anomalous position in the caste system (see *Chapter 2*). As explained, Newari people follow both Buddhism and Hinduism, and have their own sub-caste system and unique traditions (Whelpton, 2005). They are indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley and have resided in specific areas such as the historical centres of Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Lalitpur for decades.

Kaili (27, 27, Chhetri) who was training to become a schoolteacher explained how she felt that Newari widows were constrained particularly in terms of the festivals that they could attend and celebrate:

> *"It is more rigid in Newars. Their ritual is different from what we have in Brahman and Chhetri groups. They don't let her (a widowed woman) participate in any festivals or occasions within the family."*

[50] Notably Kanchi (24, 23, Nepali), a 'lower' caste Christian woman, had remarried after separating from her first husband. She married her second husband, he later passed away and Kanchi was at the time still widowed.

Jyoti (36, 35, Bhujel) who belonged to an indigenous caste maintained, "*it is very easy in indigenous groups but it is difficult in Newar, very difficult*". Participants explained that this strictness was a result of the strong and cohesive Newari communities. With their distinctive socio-cultural heritage and language, Newari people seem particularly concerned about maintaining traditions, hence their stronger enforcement of practices associated with widowhood (AFN: 03.04.14)[51].

Nonetheless, others implied it was comparatively easier for widows in Newari communities. Iswari (26, 22, Brahman) who worked in a pharmaceutical factory explained:

> *"It is harder for Brahmans and Chhetris. For some they can't go where they want, wear what they like. They aren't being allowed to wear certain clothes. In Newar community they can wear everything".*

Part of the perceived freedom that Newari women had was associated with their cultural tradition of marrying *three* times. As explained in greater detail in *Chapter 6*, Newari women are married once to a fruit[52], once to the sun and once to their husband (AFN: 14.04.14). This seemingly justified the wearing of red in Newari communities, as even though a woman's husband had died she was still married to the fruit and sun.

[51] Some women who participated in this work had difficulty speaking Nepali and only spoke Newari.

[52] A Newari girl is first married to a *'bel'* fruit between the ages of seven and nine. The *bel* fruit is a symbol of the God Vishnu and it ensures she becomes and remains fertile upon her menstruation. The *bel* fruit is a type of wood apple and does not rot. After the age of nine, and before a girl's first menstruation, she is married for a second time to the Sun God through the *Gufa* ceremony. Girls are confined to the house for 12 days and they are not allowed to see any sunlight or any men. At the end of the 12th day the girl is allowed to leave her home and she bows to the sun and has red *tika* put on her forehead. A ceremony takes place that resembles a typically wedding ceremony and the girl is given gifts and sweets. The third marriage will happen when she is older to her husband.

Durga (74, 54, Newar) was a 'high' caste Newari and lived in Dilly Bazaar with her son and daughter in-law. In this photograph (*Figure 4.3*) Durga was wearing a dark red velvet *tika* and red and white beads. She explained how because of their marriage rituals, Newari widows were not technically prohibited from wearing red:

> *"Some of them do not put on red things, but in our Newari community, we are already married to a fruit 'bel' during childhood. So we can wear red things then since we are already married. When we are kept in 'gufa' we offer water to the Sun God, so we do not have much restriction. I restrained myself for a year after buwa's (husband's) death. Now, I have been putting on this tika made of velvet (pointing to researcher)….she is finding it strange because I am putting on tika (laughs)."*

Durga further detailed that because she had a son, and did not live in the typically Newari areas within central Kathmandu, she also had greater freedom to wear the clothes she desired (see *Chapter 6*). This reiterates the importance of social identities; in this case her caste, residence and being a mother to a son shaped her experience of widowhood.

Figure 4.3: Durga pictured at her home in Dilli Bazaar

(Source: researcher's own photograph, Dilly Bazaar, October 2013)

However, some women did not feel that there were particular differences according to caste. For instance, Sabita (50, 25, Chhetri) who worked with marble masonry stated, *"previously I thought it was different, but I think everyone is same now. Everybody gets hurt if they are cut"*. Chini Maya (63, 47, Magar) stated, *"I feel everything is same for everyone regardless of their caste*". These perceptions can perhaps be attributed to the weakening caste system or the shared grief felt

amongst all widows. Further, as indigenous and 'middle' caste widows, they could have been, as compared to 'higher' caste widows, less influenced by restrictions associated with widowhood. Other participants also detailed that there were variances according to caste, but it seemed that they did not want to comment specifically on the situation of others or were unable to articulate exactly how it differed.

In addition to caste identity, it is also important to explore how inter-caste or inter-ethnicity marriages affected widowhood. As Jyoti (36, 35, Bhujel) explained, "*if you are married in an inter-caste marriage there may be a crisis."* In this respect, Jyoti was referring to the attitude of the in-laws, who may have accepted the inter-caste marriage at the time, yet, they could have become resentful of the marriage and the widowed woman when their son died, while others may not have accepted the marriage even when he was alive. Dhana Maya (50, 44, Newar) worked as a community health volunteer; she was a Chhetri and had married a Newari man. She explained how she was particularly discriminated against when attending celebrations and festivals with her family in-laws; *"they offer water to everyone and when it comes to me they say she is not our caste, she is not meant to be here".* This perhaps reflects the closed nature of Newari communities.

Similar to inter-caste marriages, love marriages can culminate in difficulties between the widowed woman and her in-laws. As evident in *Appendix 1* and *Figure 4.2,* most participants had arranged marriages (77%), yet love marriages were becoming increasingly accepted, and were more common amongst the younger generations[53]. It should be noted that a love marriage is more likely to be approved when the marriage is between two people of the same caste. In turn, because they are more 'traditional', 'higher' castes tend to be more averse to 'love'

[53] Of the 91 participants, 70 had arranged marriages, 20 had love marriages and 1 had never married.

marriages. This is reflected in this research, whereby only two Brahman women had love marriages.

This section has highlighted the ways in which caste and religious identities shape experiences of widowhood. Generally it seemed that widowhood was more restrictive for 'high' caste Hindu women as compared to 'lower' caste, indigenous and non-Hindu women. However, the complex and contradictory situation for Newari women was detailed.

AGE, AGEING AND LIFE-COURSE AMONG WIDOWED WOMEN

Age and Age When Widowed

Nepal is a demographically young country, where 62.73% of the population are 29 years old or younger (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011.). However, over the past decade, as a consequence of the high emigration of the working age population, rising life expectancies and decreasing birth rates, the population is ageing and becoming increasingly 'dependent'[54] (ibid.; United Nations Population Fund and HelpAge, 2012). It should be noted that the high number of young male and, increasingly, female migrants means traditional gender and age related roles within households and communities are altering (Hecht, 2015; Sijapati, 2014). This is especially the case in more rural areas (Cook et al., 2012). Concurrent with this ageing society, family structures and expectations around elderly care are also changing (Desai, 2014). Due to the rising cost of land, decreasing space in urban areas, increasing pressure on women to work outside the home and a growing preference to live as nuclear families, the cultural tradition of

[54] UNFPA and HelpAge describe dependents as those who are physiologically older and reliant on the working age population for support, however the contentious nature of this term needs to be considered.

living within extended households is declining (Key informant interview: HelpAge). Furthermore, older women tend to outlive older men, and thus ageing is also becoming increasingly feminised (ibid.) (see *Chapter 1* and Desai, 2014).

In terms of this research, the average age of participants was 49 years and the range was from 21 to 85 years. Significantly, just under a third of all participants (30%) were under 40 years of age. Comparing this to census data, it seems that widowed women in this study were on average older than the 'single women' within Nepal. The 2011 census data states that 67% of Nepal's single women are between the ages of 20 and 35, whereas only 17% of women in the study were younger than 35 (UN Women, 2015). This disparity can be explained by the fact that the Government data includes all women and girls who are *single* over the age of ten, rather than those who were *widowed* specifically. Furthermore, this research was conducted in the Kathmandu Valley, which is a predominately urban and 'developed' part of Nepal, in more rural areas women often marry younger and therefore become widowed or single at a younger age.

In terms of age when widowed, the average age was 38 years and the range was from 19 to 73 years (see *Figure 4.2*). The relatively young age when widowed can be deduced from high mortality rates among young and middle aged men. Within this research, premature deaths amongst men were attributed to accidents, murder, acute illness, alcoholism, suicide and heart attacks. Furthermore, the young age at which women became widowed was also attributable to the customary practice for women to marry older men (see Puri et al., 2010; Varley, 2014). According to Puri et al. (2010), on average men are three years older than women upon marriage, but in rural areas, amongst improvised groups and older women who married sometime ago this age difference was considerably larger. Older participants reported that they had

married men who were more than double their age, and some women were married as young as ten years old.

This contextualisation of age in Nepal provides the context for the next section which details how age, ageing and life-course shaped widowhood. The discussion is largely framed in the context of 'younger' and 'older' women, as it was in this way that participants predominantly discussed age. However, it is understood that age is much more fluid than the binary of young/old, and that perceptions of age vary between individuals and across cultures. Given this, the varied conceptions of age and the complexity of ageing will be addressed. With reference to this, the distinctions between different modes of time, such as age, real time, life-course, life-stage, ageing and length of time widowed will also be discussed within this chapter and also within subsequent *Chapters 5* and *6*. Furthermore it should be noted that, as detailed in *Chapter 2*, intersectional analysis should not be limited to understanding marginality as this overlooks the complex and multiple ways in which social identities shape a person's life. For instance, young widowed women may be negatively affected by suspicion and gossip; however, because of their young physiological age, these women may be less discriminated against in terms of employment as compared to older women.

Unsurprisingly, participants spoke of how it was particularly difficult for women widowed at a young age. Goma (40, 39, Newar) lived with her in-laws and her children in Indrachowk in central Kathmandu. Her marriage was a 'love marriage'[55] and she initially had a good relationship with her husband. However, after sometime they began to have financial problems and he developed an addiction to alcohol, eventually dying of his alcoholism. Reflecting on her experiences, Goma

[55] An arranged marriage "is formed through third party intervention" mostly involving parents but also potentially extended family members. A 'love marriage' is when the couple chooses to marry each other independently without intervention from their family (Merali, 2010:102).

detailed the difficulties associated with being widowed relatively young:

> *"Age makes a huge difference. At young age, it is very difficult. I find it difficult; girls younger than me will find it even more difficult. Women who have experienced many things in life might not find it as hard."*

It should be noted that Goma had only been widowed for one-year prior to interview, and perhaps felt these difficulties more acutely as a result. Usha (45, 21, Newar), who was widowed 24 years prior to interview, further explained how it felt to be widowed at a young age:

> *"The age at which you become single (widowed) does make the experience different. Those who are widowed at an old age are able to take care of themselves and they can understand what has happened. But those who become widowed at a young age, it will be very hard for them. They have a long lonely life ahead and they have to face social domination and discrimination as well. So these kinds of experiences vary."*

These extracts from interviews with Usha and Goma illustrate many of the difficulties associated with widowhood at a young age, including the burden of responsibility, loneliness, disputes with in-laws, social discrimination and lack of life experience and maturity to cope with widowhood (see Lenette, 2013).

As detailed previously, due to their reproductive age and their perceived 'heat', societal perceptions stipulate that there is a greater need to 'control' younger widows. Within her study on widowhood in West Bengal, Lamb (2000: 220-221) notes that members of the community "felt that young widows constantly threatened to become promiscuous, injuring their own honor and that of their families". Similarly, participants in this research often detailed how young widows incited suspicion and gossip. As they were not perceived as being 'sexually interested' (see *Chapter 1* and Hockey and James, 1993),

older widows were less likely to confront such issues illustrating how, in specific contexts, widowhood at an older age was desirable.

Indu (38, 31, Brahman) who worked as a tailor in Mulpani, portrayed the suspicion associated with young widowed women:

> *"People assume that as I am young I will run off or go with another man. Even if you talk to someone people wonder if you would run off with that man. In Nepal, this is like a tradition. You don't have this in foreign countries. Here, people have too many doubts about you. You cannot talk to anyone, be it your relative, your brother in-law, brother. If someone comes to visit you at your home, they start gossiping, "oh look at that man and how he is staying over there". Don't they say this? Like now, I got into the taxi with you and did you see how the three men were staring at us."*

Indu told us that regardless of this suspicion, she did not restrict what she wore or where she went, and chose to ignore such gossip. However, other women felt pressurised to adhere to the restrictions expected of widows to avoid this unwanted attention. As such, young widows often refrained from wearing red, make-up or jewellery considered to be 'pretty', visiting places on a recreational basis and talking to men within in the community (AFN: 23.04.14; see also *Chapters 1* and *6*). Sushma (38, 33, Newar) who owned a '*kirana pasal*'[56] explained, *"if we wear bangles or red clothes, then people will backbite".* She lived with her family in-law in Thimi, which explains why she could have been more concerned about conforming to restrictions to minimise gossip within the family and wider community. Narbada (28, 24, Newar) who also lived with her family in-law, explained how she did not talk to her male friends and members of the community like she did before, as she feared that people would become suspicious of her, and men would get the wrong impression.

[56] *Kirana pasal* is the term used to describe a small shop that sells everyday items such as sugar, tea, instant noodles and salt. The shop is often the front room of a person's home.

Furthermore, such suspicion caused women to be discriminated against and bullied. Reflecting on the difficulties of being younger widows, Usha (45, 21, Newar) and Sajita (66, 20, Newar) spoke of how they left to live in their *maiti* because of the suspicion they aroused, and the consequent bullying they experienced in the patrilocal home. Usha stated:

> *"My in-laws thought that because I was young I wouldn't stay with them, so they used to taunt me and control me. But if I was of a good age when my husband passed away maybe then they wouldn't have behaved in that way".*

Sajita particularly explained how she wanted to grow old quickly so that the gossip and suspicion that she incited as a young woman dissipated:

> *"I used to feel, when will I grow old? I was very beautiful when I was young. I always wished that I grow old soon, so that men won't come after me".*

The suspicion she incited could have been more acute because Sajita was childless; widowed women without children were perceived as being more likely to elope, remarry and/or have other relationships (Sabri et al., 2016). Sajita and Usha felt like this when they were younger, when restrictions for, and the discrimination against, widows were more severe than they are in contemporary Nepal. This reiterates how the temporal period can influence the changing experiences of widowhood, reinforcing the need to pay attention to when women are widowed (within the context of contemporary society) and the age at which they are widowed. Her attitudes also illustrate that ageing was not always perceived negatively.

Although the suspicion surrounding widowed women has dissipated over the decades, Rina (21, 19, Bika) spoke of how people in the community gossiped about how she might elope with another man:

> *"They do not say it directly to me, but they say it to my mother in-law or my other family members. The community don't trust us (young widows) at all…when you haven't even thought of such things people will talk on the basis of what they want to think might happen. It makes me sad."*

Given the cohesion within communities, and the fact that households often have extended family living within the same area, the suspicion surrounding widowed women was often reinforced by the wider surrounding community. Although she detailed how people in the community were suspicious of her, given that Rina and her patrilocal family were Christian and 'lower' caste, she may have not experienced the same suspicion and restrictions within her *ghar*. This relates to discussions above and in *Chapter 2* concerned with the different spheres in which 'lower' caste and 'higher' caste women face restrictions associated with widowhood. Furthermore, it highlights how an individual's 'lower' caste identity can contribute to both *privilege* and *marginalisation* in differing ways.

Being widowed young resulted in greater familial and household based pressures connected with single parenting, child rearing, stress and the burden of expenses and decision-making (Haase, 2008; Lenette, 2013). The responsibilities, and consequent stresses, of being a young widow and a single parent were highlighted by Jaya Kali (28, 26, Brahman):

> *"If a woman is 50 she has already lived a lot and experienced a lot. At 50 they are old, their family and kids have already grown up; they don't have to worry about how to bring them up. For us right now it is still hard as we still have to educate the kids, make a living, there is a whole life ahead of us*."

Jaya Kali may have found child rearing especially difficult since she had two daughters (8 and 10 years old) and one young son (5 years old), although she also spoke of how her elder daughter had recently started cooking and cleaning, thus relieving her somewhat from household duties. Jaya Kali's quote suggests something about how widowed

women perceived their age; she says that women are old when their children have grown up. Therefore in this way, conceptions of age are relational in that women perceive their age around their children and not their own chronological age. This more relational understanding of age is unsurprising given the importance of relationships to women especially within South Asia.

Related to this, some participants argued that young women had not had a chance to mature or become independent enough to cope with single life and widowhood. Jyoti (36, 35, Bhujel) explained:

> *"When a woman is widowed young, she would have less ability to think. She will obey whatever others say. I think once we are matured, we can think of those things for ourselves. So age makes a difference".*

This quote articulates how young widowed women were more likely to be dominated, and potentially manipulated by others, because of their perceived lack of life experience. At the time of interview Jyoti lived with her in-laws and spoke of how she felt overpowered by them. This also illustrates the way in which Hindu cultures are not only traditionally governed by men, but also older generations.

Young widows faced with the burden and stresses of single parenthood, but they also reported financial problems. As explained in *Chapter 1*, traditionally in Nepal, women are brought up to be housewives and mothers, and are thus dependent on their husbands – hence the financial difficulties many widowed women face (see Weiss, 1999 and Yadav, 2016). This is a consequence of the wider societal attitude discussed previously that, since daughters will leave their parental home to live in their patrilocal home, educating them is a 'waste' (Brunson, 2010; Koolwal, 2007). However, with increasing gender equality, women are also encouraged to gain employment. Yet, even if a woman is employed and financially independent, the death of one

earner in the family significantly limits her household's income, and there is little social security to support them when their husbands die (Key informant interview: WHR).

Jogmaya (40, 39, Brahman) lived with her two daughters (17 and 20 years old) in Bhaktapur where she worked for a cooperative. She spoke of her financial difficulties as a younger widow and illustrated how women were not socialised nor encouraged to learn about household responsibilities associated with finance or to develop independent careers (Weiss, 1999; Yadav, 2016):

> *"Age makes a great difference because for me, I have to educate my children so there are financial problems. In Nepal, husbands are the breadwinners of the family, so wives do not have jobs. I have a job now, but how much do I earn? I only have education up to SLC and I could not go to college. In terms of responsibilities, age makes a huge difference. For me, I have to marry them (her children). So it affects a lot at the age at which you lose your husband. If widow is old then her children could look after most of the responsibilities. Once a person is old, their work is to sit and eat but when the widow is young she has to manage everything. Most of the money is managed by the husband so women don't know a lot about managing finances and getting credits, and I found this very difficult."*

Financial stress was particularly exacerbated for women with young children (Lenette, 2013). Again in this way it seems it is more the age of a woman's children that shapes their perception of their age rather than their own chronological age. Widowed women with young children had to pay significant amounts for their education and subsistence before they reached an age where their children could contribute to the family, and childcare responsibilities compounded these financial difficulties (ibid.). Reflecting this predicament, Rina (21, 19, Bika) had two young boys (3 and 4 years old) and was worried about how she could afford to send them to school. She made knitted clothing and was the main earner within the household; her father in-law had been working as a construction labourer but due to illness was unable to work. In many ways, Rina's limited education and 'lower' caste identity compounded

the difficulties of being a young widow. Furthermore, at 21 she had to tackle issues associated with widowhood for the rest of her life.

Related to this, young widowed women also had to cope with the unexpected loss of their husbands, and the associated trauma and grief, for longer periods of time (Haase, 2008; Lenette, 2013). As Ambika (34, 25, Brahman) stressed, "*for the young ones like me our whole lives are waiting for us and suddenly you lose someone so important in your life.* Keshari (35, 25, Chhetri) was a librarian and lived with her daughter (10 years old) in Mangalbazar. She spoke of how she went to Israel to work for six years leaving her young daughter in the care of her mother. The stress induced from the grief of losing her husband at such a young age, being a single parent, moving to Israel and being separated from her daughter made her physically unwell (see Haase, 2008). Keshari, who was very emotional during her interview, described her grief:

> *"I had never imagined my life without him. My Mum was very worried, so for six months after he passed away, they did not allow me to lock the bathroom when I was inside. I wish somebody was there to love me and listen to me, but when I think about this I know it won't compare to life with Salmon".*

Mina (36, 30, Newar) was a teacher and lived in Kirtipur with her son. She similarly talked about how her family were concerned with her mental well-being and how she overcame her grief, although she did not outwardly display her emotion in the interview itself:

> *"I felt so lonely that my closest friend passed away and I also felt restless. I had my son, so to console myself I thought I have to look after him and make him a better person. Everybody was so concerned about me those days and they would not leave me even for a moment. They were worried that I would do something to myself. And as time passed I slowly managed things by myself"*

Although these women were still grieving, the pain of losing their husbands had somewhat subsided and their mental well-being seemed to improve since the period when they were first widowed. This

illustrates how the experiences of widowhood change according to the age at which women were widowed and the length of time they had been widowed.

While sexual and emotional intimacy was not overtly mentioned, participants did express how they missed having someone to 'walk with', a phrase translated from Nepali which was often used to imply an intimate relationship (AFN: 11.05.14). As a result of societal restrictions around remarrying, only two of the participants had remarried and no one disclosed of having a relationship – if they did they kept it a secret[57]. Evidently, younger women had to live longer without this intimacy in their lives.

There were specific issues associated with becoming widowed young, for example suspicion within the patrilocal home and community, the trauma of losing their husband at a young age and the double burden of childcare and earning an income. In this way widowhood was perceived to be generally more difficult for young women. However, as a consequence of women's diverse intersectional identities and incidences within the life-course, experiences of widowhood were not monolithic. Importantly, some older widows confronted similar struggles to younger women, but also had disparate problems as a consequence of the intersection between their older physiological age, gender and their marital status. Furthermore, while younger women were treated with more suspicion, older widows felt a greater pressure amongst their generation to adhere to cultural practices (see *Chapter 6*), thus are both pressured to adhere to norms but in differing ways. Related to this, the length of time women had been widowed did not always correlate with the difficulties and the grief they experienced. For example, some women who had been widowed at an older age or

[57] It is more accepted for younger women or women without children to remarry. This said, during my time in Nepal I only came across one woman who had remarried after the death of her first husband, but who had not remarried after the loss of her second husband. Another woman was separated from her first husband; she married again and was later widowed, but she had not remarried since.

widowed for a longer time were grieving as much as women who were widowed close to the time of interview or had been widowed young.

One of the key issues older widowed women faced was their reliance upon their children for support. As parents' age, their children, especially their sons, are expected to look after them, however Desai and Tye (2009) importantly stress that this does not always happen in reality[58], and Vera-Sanso (2012) demonstrates the increase in the number of older women who are self-supporting or subsidising their children's income (see *Chapter 1*). Notably older *widows*, as compared to older *married* women, are more economically vulnerable, as, in the absence of their husbands, they rely more heavily on their children's and their own income. This happened regardless of the age at which women became widowed. At the time of interview, Maiya (50, 28, Brahman) was financially dependent on her only son, who was trying to seek employment in Europe and had been imprisoned in Greece. As a result of this, she had been unable to receive any remittances and had been struggling to support herself, her daughter in-law and her grandchildren. Her difficult situation was evident given that after the interview was completed she asked me if I could financially support her grandchildren. This supports Desai's (2014) work that highlights the impoverishment amongst older generations.

Older widows often spoke of how their children provided their food and healthcare, but did not give them any money of their own to spend freely, enabling them to be independent. This was particularly marked during a focus group as women explained how they wanted to attend adult education classes, but their children would not provide them money for notebooks and stationary. Importantly, participants

[58] As discussed, upon marriage daughters move into their marital home, and sons continue to live with their parents and inherit their property. With this privilege sons are expected to provide for, and support, their parents as they age. Since daughters are commonly obligated to look after their in-laws, there is less expectation to look after their own family.

explained that if their husbands had been alive their children would have been less likely to treat them in such a way.

Older widow's reliance upon their adult children meant that some were vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Anita (64, 57, Gurung) lived with her sons in Maipi; she enjoyed singing and playing traditional music on the drums. Although she had a positive relationship with her own children, she detailed how *"older widows tend to be ignored by their children, and sometimes they get physically, verbally and mentally abused and also killed"*.

Reflecting this, there were instances in this research where participants disclosed that their children, particularly their sons and daughters in-law, had physically and mentally abused them (AFN: 02.04.14). Close friends Shyam (67, 64, Newar) and Sita (64, 58, Newar) expressed how they were bullied and verbally abused by their sons and daughters in-law. Neither Shyam nor Sita were educated or wealthy, perhaps contributing to their vulnerability and the lack of respect their sons and daughters in-law showed towards them. Whilst she did not specifically detail physical violence, Sita spoke of the situation for other older widows in her community:

> *"In this community there is certain kind of practice that sons and daughter in-laws don't look after widowed women. There is domestic violence, widows are also blamed (for the death of their husbands) and called witches. They always live with fear."*

In relation to this, an older Newari woman who participated in a focus group told of how her adult son physically abused her, as she would not give her property to him. She eventually sought the support of the local WHR group who confronted him and he had not beaten her since. Significantly, widows lacked the authority that the husbands had had which ensured that the couple were both respected, supported and cared for. This illustrates the difference between the intersections of

age and gender, and age, gender and martial status. Notably, abuse seemed to occur regardless of whether a widow had been recently widowed or had been widowed for a long time.

Indeed, the abuse of older widows by their adult children and/or children in-law often arose from property disputes. Dhan Jumari (76, 50, Brahman), who founded BISWO and campaigned for the rights of senior citizens, explained how *"property is one of the biggest challenges for the older single women (widows) and senior citizens that I have observed"*. When her husband died, Dhan Jumari's children tried to cheat her out of her own property. She refused to let them take it and involved the police. While she successfully secured her rightful property, she no longer spoke to her sons. Dhan Jumari was able to retain her property as a consequence of her education, and the knowledge she developed of women's rights through her social work[59]. She reported how other older widows were not as fortunate as her and had been cheated out of their rightful property because they were unaware of their rights and were illiterate. Notably, women of a younger generation were, on the whole, more educated, literate and aware of their rights, and consequently less vulnerable to these issues. Thus, in some ways being a young widow was advantageous. This particular story illustrates the ways in which intersectional identities, in this case, Dhan Jumari's class and subsequent education, shaped her experience of widowhood.

Older widows, regardless of how long they had been widowed also expressed a loss of partnership, intimacy and friendship upon the death of their husbands. Therefore, these feelings were not limited to women who had been widowed at a young age or recently widowed. Romita (60, 48, Sunuwar) spoke of her loneliness and depression:

[59]Dhan Jumari had the opportunity of education through her father's Government job. She was one of the only girls at her school during that time (see *Chapter 5*).

> *"I feel alone now and depressed as well…I feel my life is sad now and I worry about whether my life from now on will be happy or worse than this."*

Prashamsa (60, 56, Newar) detailed how she felt *"sad"* and *"alone"* since her husband had died and that she was not only missing her husband's partnership, but was 'mourning' the absence of care and support from her children:

> *"My children don't come to visit me often, so I feel sad. Had my husband been there I don't think it would be this difficult for me. My children would have at least come to help me and my daughters in-law would listen to me as well - if nothing else then at least out of the fear of their father. The people in the community also talk behind my back because I have no one"*

As detailed in *Chapter 5*, women who lived without the support of their children or husbands were pitied and perceived as being lonely. Bishnu Maya (85, 55, Newar) was an elderly widow who lived alone in Ghattekulo with her pet tortoise. Her children did not support her and were trying to take her property. As a consequence, the absence of her children, and the conflict she had with them, exacerbated the difficulties of being widowed.

Evidently many of the issues older widows faced were concerned with their dependence upon their children. Older widows issues appeared to differ to those of other older women generally, due to the absence of their husbands for support. Furthermore, older widows also faced problems associated with being older women generally: for example, health problems, discrimination in terms of employment and illiteracy that arguably compounded the difficulties of widowhood.

This section has illustrated the disparate realities for women widowed at a young age and those widowed at an older age. For instance, in the context of income, older widows' issues largely stemmed from their

dependence on their children, whereas younger widows' issues emanated from the stresses associated with their children's subsistence and education. However, experiences of widowhood were not necessarily neatly divided along the lines of age; some older women spoke of difficulties that were more typically associated with younger women and vice versa. Notably, women widowed at a young age, but who were older at the time of participation would have experienced these varying situations across their lives, which reiterates the importance of a life-course perspective.

Perceptions of Age and Ageing Among Nepali Widows

As detailed in *Chapter 2,* whilst older people traditionally govern societal and familial codes of conduct in South Asia, in recent years the control and decision-making, especially within the family, is increasingly with the younger generations (see Desi and Tye, 2009; Desai, 2014; Lamb, 2000; Lamb, 2013). The country director of HelpAge Nepal explained how she felt this shift was due to changing Nepali society where the norm of living in extended families was declining (see also *Chapter 1*). It is within this context that the perceptions of age and ageing are discussed.

Ageing is a nuanced process and is experienced in differing, and sometimes conflicting, ways. In Hindu cultures, when a woman's husband dies, aspects of her emotional and social life also come to an end, as the traditions and cultural expectations directly associated with widowhood exist to accelerate these feelings of ageing (Lamb, 2000). As a consequence of these rituals, women who are generationally young reside within a complicated space where they are considered to be socially old (Lamb, 2000 and Vera Sanso, 2006). Given this, this

research explored processes of ageing on widowhood, and how women perceived their age.

It was evident that some women felt older than their physiological age as a consequence of their marital status. Shasi (48, 47, Brahman) who lived in Mulpani with her two adult children explained:

> *"I feel I am older than a married woman my age. Mostly because that my husband is not around…maybe because of that I feel older than my age."*

Susheel (48, 42, Newar) further explained, *"when I was widowed I felt older than my age, I felt that my life was over".* Upon asking if she still felt like this Susheel expressed, "*not as much as when I was first widowed but I do feel older than other married woman my age".*

In this way it seemed that in the immediate period post widowhood, women felt older and ageing more acutely. This can be partly explained by the fact that within the first year of widowhood, women have to adhere to many restrictions that accelerate the process of ageing. After the first year some of these are lifted, therefore somewhat slowing down ageing thereafter (see *Chapter 1*). This illustrates the dynamic and changing experiences of ageing and perceptions of age across the life-course (Hockey and James, 1993; Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Versa Sanso, 2006).

These perceptions of feeling older than their 'generational' age were partly attributable to socio-cultural and embodied expectations associated with widowhood as well as the responsibilities and stresses of widowed life and single parenting. Ambika (34, 25, Brahman) felt that she was older, that she was ageing prematurely and that her life had ended upon her widowhood, and it seemed like the associated restrictions made her feel that way:

> "It is more like your life has ended after your husband's death. You are no longer free and there are so many things you have to follow".

The way adornment practices initiated feelings of premature ageing were further echoed by Urmila (66, 62, Brahman):

> *"After I became a widow I felt older than married women. I can't wear the colours, tika, bangles or anything that a married woman does. So when I compare myself I feel I am older than married women".*

While her husband had encouraged her to continue wearing red clothing after his death, he had instructed her not to wear bangles, *tika* or *pote*. Notably, although some restrictions are lifted after the first year of widowhood, for example being prohibited from wearing red, some continue for the rest of a woman's life, such as wearing *pote* and *sindur* (see above and *Chapter 1*; Lamb, 200 and Yadav, 2016). By not being permitted to wear these accessories, Urmila felt older than married women of the same generation. Thus, it was the restrictions associated with widowhood and comparing themselves to other married women that shaped Urmila and Ambika's perceptions of their age. In this way perceptions of age can be seen as highly relational and social.

Furthermore, there may have been greater pressure for Urmila to adhere to these practices since she was a Brahman; 'higher' caste women were typically under greater pressure to adhere to Hindu cultural norms, not only from society, but also from their families or their own internalisation (see above and *Chapter 2*). Furthermore, akin to 'high' caste women, older women were often more concerned about adhering to traditional practices (see *Chapter 6*). This reinforces the ways in which intersecting social identities, in this case caste and age, shape the experience of widowhood.

Whilst cultural practices induced feelings of premature ageing, it seemed that the increased responsibility and consequent stress associated with widowhood, household headship and single parenthood also had an implicit affect on untimely ageing. Those who were particularly dependant on their husbands, financially and otherwise, perhaps felt this more acutely. Usha (45, 21, Newar) spoke of how she felt older than her physiological age; *"I feel that all the responsibilities that I had to take by myself has taken toll in my physical being, so I felt older as a result".* While Usha had a job making mud heaters, she did not earn a significant amount, contributing to her financial responsibilities and pressures. In this way her perception of her age was perceived around her responsibilities and the economic pressures she faced. Shanti (33, 24, Newar), who worked as a cleaner in a hospital in Lalitpur and lived with her son (14 years old), also felt older because of the burden of her responsibilities:

> *"I have to work hard, to feed my son, to fulfil his wishes. Basically my life revolves around making my son a good person and I don't get involved in other things. So this added responsibility makes me feel that I am old."*

This overwhelming responsibility caused anxiety, loneliness, ill health, isolation and even suicidal thoughts amongst some widowed women. Santu Kumari (50, 41, Achami), a 'lower' caste widow who lived in Phutung, explained how she felt about her age:

> *"I feel like I have many tensions and responsibilities. Due to these, I don't have good health. Sometimes I feel like it will be better if I die. My house is under debt and it is not fully constructed. When my husband was around, we had our agricultural land, now we don't have anything. Nothing is going right for us. All these tensions make me feel much older."*

Santu Kumari has faced many difficulties in her life; her father died when she was young, she was married at 11 and she had continuing problems with debt. Thus widowhood had, in many ways, compounded the stresses she already faced, influencing her feelings of premature

ageing. Understanding her history in this way reiterates the importance of a life-course perspective. Furthermore, issues connected with her marital status were perhaps exacerbated by her caste and class status – her class was attributed through her lack of education, lack of property, financial status and to some extent her 'lower' caste.

Participants also explained how this loneliness associated with decision-making made them prematurely age. Chandra Kala (62, 46, Brahman) who had health problems and lived alone in Dilly Bazaar stated:

> *"I feel old now. I feel scared to take my decisions alone because life has been a big struggle for me. And this feeling of lost strength doesn't allow me to decide for myself."*

However, others described this increased responsibility associated with ageing as 'maturing', and this was not necessarily perceived negatively. At the time of interview, Jaya Kali (28, 26, Brahman) was exhausted from the pressures of being a working mother, having three young children and the grief of losing her husband. She explained that because she had no one with whom she could share this responsibility, she felt that she had to mature quickly and perceived this as a positive thing. Related to this, other widowed women detailed how they wanted to age quickly, evidence that they did not all perceive ageing negatively. As highlighted above, Sajita (66, 20, Newar) stated how she wanted to age to stop the unwanted attention from men and the suspicion surrounding her:

> *"I feel growing older has made my life easier and I like it. At that time when I was young, my in-laws used to blame me and used to scold me because they thought that I was going to go out with another man, and now they don't say anything like that, so I feel good growing old. When I was young it was really hard to live my life and now it is easy."*

The responsibilities of widowhood, and the associated socio-cultural practices made some women feel that they were 'prematurely' ageing, but participants also detailed how natural bodily deterioration and health problems made them feel like they were 'naturally' ageing. In some incidences older women who needed to continue to work spoke of how they could not afford to think of themselves as older or ageing. Thus, in this way economic necessity shaped their perceptions of their age and ageing.

While some women felt older as a consequence of their widowhood, others detailed the contrary. Through their increased responsibility, independence and sense of purpose, and the consequent praise and admiration they received for their hard work and strength upon widowhood, some widowed women felt younger (see DiGiulio, 1989). Contrary to previous participants, these women also framed their perception of age around their responsibilities, but instead their responsibilities made them feel younger. Jyoti (36, 35, Bhujel), who was widowed one year prior to the interview, was enthusiastic and gregarious. She worked as an events organiser and had a daughter (5 years old) whom she doted on. Her feelings of what might be termed as 'regressive ageing' were reflected in this following extract:

> *"I feel very young because he handed over all the responsibilities. I have to fulfil all his duties now. I have to look after my daughter….people appreciated me for my efforts despite my grief. So I feel younger."*

Kabina (32, 29, Newar) who lived with her in-laws and her young children also reiterated feelings of 'renewed youth'; "*I feel younger. I should take over all the responsibilities of my husband. I have never felt old".*

It was not only physiologically younger women who felt a renewed sense of independence upon widowhood. Dhan Jumari (76, 50

Brahman) spoke of how living alone and working made her independent and that she felt younger as a result. Expressing similar feelings Tara Devi (54, 46, Chhetri) stated:

> *"I feel young at heart. When people tell me 'you are getting older' then I tell them, no I am just young. I have a long life to live. The time I have I should enjoy it in a fun manner, why be sad…. I feel younger than married women my age. When people see me they can't see that I am a single woman, because I wear all kind of clothes, I don't only wear glass beads and sindur, the rest I wear it."*

Tara Devi's positive outlook on life, and the fact that she resisted most of the adornment practices expected of widowed women, shaped her perception of age and made her feel that she was not ageing. Despite her ill health, and issues with her eldest son who was a drug addict and has been in and out of prison, she was light hearted and resilient. This draws parallels with Kaufman's (1986) research where older people do not define themselves as old but as 'ageless'.

Importantly, for women who were married at a young age, widowhood brought freedom, independence and the opportunity for fun that they perhaps missed out on during their youth, thus resulting in feelings of 'regressive ageing'. Indu (38, 31, Brahman) spoke of how she was married at 15; her husband was 32 and already had another wife. When she found out that she was to be married she was devastated. Married life and child rearing within the *ghar* can be tiring, stressful and restrictive, denying girls and young women their youth. It appeared that Indu enjoyed telling jokes, dressing up and taking life lightly, and she seemed more like a friend to her children than a mother. In this way she was perhaps 'reclaiming' some of her missed youth. Indu described her life as a widow, compared to being married:

> *"I have to say it, the life I have now is so much better than the life back then and even when my husband was alive. It's so much better now. It's much more relaxing. I can do everything at my own pace.*

Evidently, the independence, responsibility, and the praise they received for their efforts 'energised' some women, making them feel younger. This corresponds to DiGiulio's (1989: 30) psychology based research that explores how some widowed women can have an "identity rebirth" after the death of their husbands, and how they can feel a greater sense of independence, assertiveness and competence with their new single identity. Such findings deconstruct the synonymisation of widowhood with 'old age', the notion that widowhood automatically induces ageing, and importantly decentres the period of widowhood. Furthermore, determined feelings of youthfulness were implicit to understanding agency, especially when gendered cultural practices associated with widowhood attempt to activate ageing. Indu's story also illustrates how women were not wholly negatively affected by their widowhood; this appropriately leads to the next section that illustrates the value of de-centring widowhood.

A Life-Course Approach: Decentring 'Widowhood'

As detailed in *Chapter 2,* this thesis adopts an intersectional life-course lens. Through an intersectional approach it shifts the focus away from the identity of 'widowed' and with a life-course approach it decentres the period of 'widowhood'. Importantly, widowhood was not always the most significant life event in shaping women's lives, and for some it was one among several struggles that they faced. Arguing the value of a life-course perspective for researching widowhood, Chambers (2002: 36) states "the narratives which emerge from that life history inevitably have an impact on the current experience". Undertaking oral histories, and exploring widows' lives prior to becoming widowed in semi-structured interviews, enabled a contextualisation of widowhood

among other life-course stages (see Chambers, 2005). Most significantly, through a life-course perspective, this research was able to reveal that some women were *better off* upon widowhood.

Whilst the practice of marriage is critical for women, especially in patriarchal countries, not all women in this research had happy or positive marriages, and some women seemed relatively happier upon widowhood. This supports scholarly work including Chant's (2004, 2006 and 2008) which problematises the 'feminisation of poverty' narrative that attests that female-headed households are 'worse off' without their husbands. Furthermore, Jha and White (2016: 146) maintain that the "association between marriage and wellbeing is generally claimed to be significant and positive", but that the quality of the marriage may be more important than marital status itself.

Not surprisingly, women who had been physically and verbally abused by their husbands' spoke of how their lives improved upon widowhood. Indra (55, 45, Newar) who lived in Central Kathmandu recalled how her husband abused her:

> *"He would beat me. He could beat me anywhere when he was angry. He would also not care if there were people around. It was so difficult."*

Women who had alcoholic husbands also argued that their lives were comparatively better as widows as they were freed from the violence, stress, cost and embarrassment associated with being the wife of an alcoholic. Sabita (50, 25, Chhetri) explained:

> *"My husband used to consume alcohol and he would often beat me. He had even asked me to leave his house. We had some land but he sold it to pay for his alcohol. He did not leave any property to me and because of that I have suffered a lot. So I do not miss him too much".*

Kishun (46, 43, Newar) converted to Christianity nine years prior to the interview in the hope that her husband would stop drinking. Kishun ran a teashop at a construction site in Bhainsepati. She stated, "*he used to drink alcohol the whole day. He used to speak badly to me and beat me. He didn't work, so I had to earn and provide for him".* Kishun went onto explain how she was previously very thin because of the stress he caused and how she had gained weight since he passed away. Narayan Tara (59, 34, Newar) lived in Chapagaun with her son and his family, and her husband was also an alcoholic:

> *"It is much easier for me now than when he was with me. When he was alive he used to sell everything. Sometimes he used to come to the kitchen and even steal the rice for cooking, he would then sell it and spent all the money on alcohol. It was really a miserable situation when he was alive. I am happier now.*

Debts accrued as a result of medical expenses put further pressure and stress upon women and their families. Upon the death of their husbands, although the debt remained, the anxiety surrounding it was somewhat lifted, as there would be no further medical expense incurred. Importantly, most of the women who were previously affected by their husbands' alcoholism were Newari[60]. This illustration of women's experience of unhappy marriage as a consequence of violence or alcoholism echoes Chant's (2008: 175) arguments that female-headed households might experience "a greater sense of well-being because their lives are freer from conflict, coercion or violence".

There were other difficulties of marriage and relationships beyond alcoholism, associated with personality clashes, age differences, violence and the pressures of polygamous relationships. As detailed, Indu (38, 31, Brahman) was her husband's second wife; upon marriage she was 15 years old and he was 32. She explained how she felt more

[60] Alcohol consumption between castes can be divided into Tagadhari and Matawalis. Tagadhari refers to the 'higher' castes of Brahman and Chhetri, who are not generally permitted to drink alcohol as this could pollute their purity. Conversely, it is a traditional custom within the Matawalis, typically Newari people and those of 'lower' caste, to drink alcohol (Neupane and Bramness, 2014).

relaxed, independent and confident upon widowhood as compared to marriage (DiGiulio, 1989). Binita (60, 43, Chhetri), who was also a second wife, also explained how she did not feel close to her husband and how she had a difficult relationship with her stepchildren. Upon the death of her husband, her stepchildren left and at the time of interview she was living with her own children:

> *"Well my life wasn't very easy even when he was alive. My stepchildren, even though I tried to treat them like my children, at the end of the day they call you step-mother and leave you. I feel better about my life now."*

Tulasha (46, 39, Brahman) was married at 14 years old and her husband was 39. Around seven years prior to the interview her husband left and she had not seen him since. Although she was still technically married she identified as widowed. Tulasha lived in an informal housing settlement next to the banks of the Bagmati river with her daughter and son. She explained how her in-laws supported her, but her husband did not, hence why she was happier with her single status:

> "*The family (patrilocal) was really good to me, even though I was from the village and uneducated… they encouraged me and increased my confidence. But I never got support from my husband. Maybe if he had supported me, I would have been educated and at least maybe I would have done my School Leaving Certificate (SLC). He just used to think that I am a wife and I should just stay home."*

Perhaps understandably, women who had difficult relationships with their husbands or their husbands' families were happier upon widowhood. In other circumstances, their husbands' peaceful death, and at a reasonable age, meant that although women missed them, they were less aggrieved by their widowhood. Chandra Kala (62, 46, Brahman) lived alone in rented accommodation and received help around the house from another women who lived there. She seemed

happy living alone and valued this independence. Asked whether her life had changed after her husband passed away, she reflected that:

> *"No it hasn't changed and is as it used to be. I am not worried that he passed away. I am happy that he didn't fall ill for a long time and was bedridden. I was content that I didn't have to see him in a frail or sorry state. That would have made me sad because seeing someone like your husband in such a frail condition how sad would that be? He was ill only for four days and passed away on the fourth day. So nothing has changed for me. I am doing and following what I had been doing when my husband was there"*

Therefore becoming widowed was not a profound period in Chandra Kala's life-course, as her life seemed to be the same as if he were still alive. This reiterates the importance of not essentialising the period of widowhood.

It was not only marriage or widowhood that was a struggle for women. Sunita (34, 24, Newar) had a difficult childhood as her mother was very sick, and as the eldest daughter, it was her responsibility to look after her mother and fulfil her role within the home. This put a lot of pressure on her and meant she could not pursue her education. Kanchi (24, 23, Nepali) was orphaned at a young age and her elder siblings looked after her. However, they struggled to fulfill her basic needs, and because of this she was married when she was 12[61]. She was not treated well by her first husband and she was forced to live in a cow shed outside her *ghar*. She eventually separated from him and remarried, but her second husband later died. When she became widowed the pastor in her local area arranged a job for her in an orphanage in Lalitpur where she could live with her daughter. Although widowed, her life seemed more comfortable now.

[61] Children who are orphaned and in the care their older siblings, aunties and uncles often get married young. This is to minimise the family's outgoings and if a girl is married young the dowry payment will be lower.

Rekha's (45, 41, Pudasaini) difficulties started when she was seven years old as her siblings bullied her. She was sold by her cousin at the age of 10 and married to a man who was 16 years her senior. She subsequently gave birth to a daughter, which displeased him, as he wanted a son. This was followed by a period when he physically abused both Rekha and her daughter. Her infant daughter later died as a result of this abuse, with her husband dying some six years later. Rekha then remarried, but was widowed once again as her second husband committed suicide. Such examples detail how other life experiences, other then marriage and widowhood, shaped women's lives. In this way a life-course perspective is essential in not defining women's lives solely around their relationships with men.

This life-course perspective stops the essentialisation of the temporal period of 'widowhood', and most importantly reveals how women may be *'better off'* upon the death of their husbands. Such possibilities are somewhat overlooked within existing research, as they predominantly focus on the period of widowhood and the negative effects of becoming widowed (Chen and Drèze, 1992; Drèze and Srinivasan, 1997; Dutt and Harma, 2010; Holden, 1988; Loomba Foundation, 2015; Mari Bhat, 1994; Owen, 1996; Weir and Willis, 2000; Young, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has exemplified the value of exploring widowhood through an intersectional life-course lens, by doing so it progresses current understandings of widows and widowhood. Further to this, it expands on existing scholarship within the realm of gender and development that has advocated the integration of an intersectional and a life-course approach. An intersectional lens uncovers embedded experiences and the heterogeneity of widowed women. Moreover, a focus on intersectionality is instrumental in not only uncovering those

dimensions of identity that marginalise widows in myriad ways, but also, perhaps contradictorily, those that sometimes simultaneously signify privilege. This reinforces the argument that intersectionality should not merely be a tool for understanding oppression. In turn, a life-course approach particularly enables a temporal perspective, allowing us to understand, and contextualise, widowhood with reference to the whole life-course. By doing so it is evident that widowhood was not the only period in the life-course worthy of attention, and that women's lives could actually be improved upon the death of their husbands. In addition, conceptualisations of well-being and acts of agency were further contextualised by situating them within the life-course and in accordance with intersectional identities, therefore an intersectional life-course approach is not limited to this chapter.

Having provided a brief overview of the heterogeneity among widowed women, this chapter focused in particular on caste and religion, and age and ageing; caste and age were the most significant social identities in shaping widows lives. Although previous research has also similarly explored the differing experiences according to caste and age, the experience of widowhood at the confluence of these identities is not considered, and other identities such as class, religion, ethnicity, and locality have been widely overlooked (see Chakravarti, 1995; Chen and Drèze, 1992 and 1995; Chen, 2000; Jensen, 2005; Martin-Matthews, 2011; Yadav, 2016). While caste and age are discussed separately, their interconnectivity is outlined throughout.

Generally, widowhood was a more restrictive experience for 'high' caste Hindu women as compared to 'lower' caste, indigenous and non-Hindu women. Furthermore, given their ambiguous position in the caste system, the complex and contradictory experiences of Newari women were detailed. As illustrated in *Chapter 2,* much of the existing research has focused on 'high' caste widows and scholarly research detailing the

unique situation of indigenous and 'lower' caste widows remains sparse. In Nepal the unique situation for Newari widows is underexplored. Thus, this research makes a significant contribution to studies of widowhood in Nepal, and within South Asia more broadly. Furthermore, whilst, it is already somewhat considered as a social identity within intersectional theory, this chapter reinstates the importance of caste in shaping women's lives.

The second section traced differences in the experiences of widowhood according to age; such heterogeneity was uncovered by adopting an intersectional lens. This section illustrated the differing issues for younger and older widowed women. Yet, whilst such experiences of widowhood were in some way specific to age and stage in life-course, they did not always follow expected trajectories, and also varied depending on the confluence of other identities related to class, education and caste and according to life situations. As detailed in *Chapter 1* and *2,* much of the existing research on widowhood depicts widows as 'older'. However, by exploring widowhood at varying ages, this thesis makes an important contribution to a small body of scholarly work that investigates widowhood amongst not just older, but young and middle aged women. In doing so, like caste, this chapter reinforces the significance of age as a social identity within intersectional analysis.

Within this discussion of age, the contrasting ways in which widowhood shaped feelings of ageing were delineated. While some women felt older as a result of their widowhood, others felt younger as a consequence of the independence, and the struggle and responsibility associated with their marital status. In particular it highlighted that for women married at a young age, widowhood afforded them the opportunity to 'reclaim' their youth. Perceived in this way, ageing was not always a linear trajectory through the life-course nor was it uniformly experienced in the same way. By delineating these possible feelings of *regressive,* rather than merely focusing on *progressive* ageing,

this thesis contributes to work on ageing amongst widowed women (DiGiulio, 1989; Lamb, 2000), and to scholarship on ageing more broadly.

This section also detailed the importance of paying attention to a woman's whole life-course. By decentring widowhood, the research contextualised embedded experiences, but also illustrated that becoming widowed was not necessarily the most significant event or period in a woman's life. Critically this research delineated that some women felt *better off* and more independent upon widowhood, confronting scholarly work on widowhood and the 'feminisation of poverty' that predominantly contends that widowed women and female-headed households are *worse off* without their husbands (see Chant, 2007; Jha and White, 2016). Such a focus on how becoming widowed may improve certain aspects of women's lives, appropriately leads onto the following chapter concerned with documenting embedded conceptions of well-being.

CHAPTER 5

EMBEDDED CONCEPTIONS OF WELL-BEING AMONG WIDOWS IN NEPAL

> *"For me a good life is one where people won't run only after money, but look at other aspects of life…for example, to be healthy, happy, helpful and independent. That's what is most important for a good life." (Dhan Jumari, 76, 50, Brahman)*

Dhan Jumari considered herself lucky. She grew up in the Terai region of Nepal, where, at the time, girls were not permitted to attend school. With her parents' consent, she snuck into school and the teachers shut the doors and windows so that the community could not see that some girls were studying there. However, due to political instability after the fall of the Rana regime, it was not safe for her to continue her education, and she was married at the age of 13. By the time she was 20 she had given birth to four children. In 1975 she set up a business with her husband in order to support the secondary education of her children. The business was successful and Dhan Jumari and her husband then developed it into a social enterprise Bhotu-Indira Social Welfare Organisation (BISWO) that supported the employment of many women in the local area. Her husband died when she was 50 years old. However, Dhan Juamri's work did not stop, she expanded her efforts to support the education of women and children who were imprisoned and the education of children in a rural school on the outskirts of Kathmandu. Dhan Jumari continued to work, and at the age of 76, she got up at five every morning to do her daily exercises and then went to work at BISWO. The awards and certificates she has received for her services to social work, of which she was clearly very proud, can be seen in the background of the photograph (*Figure 5.1*). Her position as a widowed woman and an expert in gender-based issues in Nepal gave her a unique perceptive on well-being.

Figure 5.1: Dhan Juamri pictured at her office in Dilli Bazaar

(Source: researcher's own photograph, Dilly Bazaar, October 2013)

As identified in *Chapter 2*, much of the existing scholarship, especially in the Global South, has predominantly researched widowhood by utilising orthodox conceptions of poverty. Yet, widowhood does not automatically result in poverty, and while in many instances widows can be 'economically' poor, their lived experience of being widowed extends beyond experiencing a 'lack of income'. Such narrow perspectives overlook more positive aspects needed to live well such as self-esteem, education, faith, relationships, independence and security, and the multidimensionality of a life well-lived more broadly. This research adopted a more holistic and heuristic lens, whereby the material, social, psychological, relational, religious and emotional elements of well-being were all considered equally. Furthermore, as identified in *Chapter 4*, the adoption of a life-course perspective illustrates that widowhood is not synonymous with a lack of well-being, nor is it necessarily the only or the most critical incident shaping well-being in a life-course.

In this chapter, I begin by detailing widowed women's definitions of a 'good life' (see *Chapter 3*) and the key ingredients that they identified as being central to such a life. Building upon this, their diverse understandings are categorised as material, perceptual and relational. While these are discussed separately, and in turn, it is important to recognise that these elements could not be neatly and exclusively categorised as material, perceptual or relational. As such, the discussion illustrates the various points at which they interrelate and overlap (White et al., 2014). The importance of relationships and relatedness in transcending conceptions of well-being will be considered throughout. Furthermore, within this chapter the way in which social identities, and incidences in the life-course, shaped conceptions of well-being will also be illustrated, and reference will be made to how conceptualisations changed temporally.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF WELL-BEING

Whilst there are universal needs that are common to all, well-being is also subjective and means multiple things to different people, and conversations and findings within this research demonstrated this. *"Being independent"*, "*a happy life for my children", "education", "love", "self-confidence", "family", "money", "employment", "having your family around you", "faith"* and *"income*" were some of the words and phrases widows used to describe a good life. Participants such as Birmaya (43, 28, Newar), a gregarious and confident woman who owned a clothes shop, explained that a good life was *"to have your heart and then the support from your family."*[62] Indu (38, 31, Brahman) who was a tailor in Mulpani stressed that for her a good life was:

> *"One where I wouldn't have to depend on others, where no one discriminates and everyone talks positively and highly of me. And also where I talk positively about others."*

Indu's perception highlights the centrality of relatedness to well-being in Nepal.

These are only a few of the myriad ways in which well-being was elaborated upon. *Table 5.1* and *5.2* below and *Appendix 1*[63] also illustrate the patterns according to how well-being was perceived. As evident in the tables, aspects of well-being such as confidence, a house, basic needs, family, money, love and education were repeatedly mentioned. Looking at these conceptions, one can see how they can, to varying degrees, be categorised within the spheres of material, perceptual and relational well-being. In terms of material well-being

[62] By 'heart' I later discovered that she meant to be emotionally stable and have the capacity to support others.

[63] *Table 5.1* shows each individual participants well-being ranking (participants are identified by their number); the top three elements have been highlighted accordingly. *Table 5.2* shows conceptions of well-being before and after widowhood from a ranking exercise carried out in FGD's. *Appendix 1* correlates an individual's top three well-being ranking with their individual demographic information.

participants particularly stressed the importance of basic needs and income, home ownership, education and health. Related to perceptual well-being they highlighted the significance of self-confidence, independence and faith, and with regard to relational well-being they articulated the necessity of family, children and friendships.

It was evident that whilst objective and universal dimensions of well-being such as basic needs and income were articulated, of equal importance were more locally embedded and subjective dimensions such as family, self-confidence and independence. This supports contributions by scholars who advocate the need to consider material dimensions of poverty and well-being, but to also look beyond these (see Chant, 2007; McIlwaine and Moser, 2003; Nussbaum, 2000; Razavi, 2000 and Sen, 1990).

Table 5.1: Results of well-being ranking with individual participants

No.	Money	Faith	Friends	Confidence	Family	Education/ knowledge	Health	House	Skills/ employment	Rights	Love	Basic needs	Peace	Communication	Voice	In-dependence	Other
1	5	4		3	1							2	6				
3	14	3	10	1	6	7	5		11	8	4	12	2	13	9		
4	6		11	3	4	5	2		9	8	7	1		10			
5	4	5	3	1	2					6							
7	4		5	1	2								3				
8	4			2	3	1											
13	3	4		2	5	6	1										
15				1	3	2	4		5			6	7		8		
18		5		4	8		1	9	7		3	6	2				
19		2	4	1	3									5			
20					2				1					3			
21				1		2			3		4						
22	3			1					4	5	6						trust 2
23			7	4	5	6					2	1	3				
24		2		1		3			6		5	4					
25	1			4	3						5	2					
26		2			4		3					1					
27	2		6	1	4	3	5	7			8	9					
28	4		6	3		2	1				5	9		8			
29		6		7	2	1	5		3			4	8				
30			3			1		2									
31		2		1	3	4	5								6		
32	4	5		3	6	1	2										
34	1			3							2		4				
35		1		6			4		3	5		2					
38						3					2	1					
40		2			1												
41	1	4			2							3					
45		4		2		3	1		5								
47	1					2	3		5		4	6					

No.	Money	Faith	Friends	Confidence	Family	Education/ knowledge	Health	House	Skills/ employment	Rights	Love	Basic needs	Peace	Communication	Voice	In-dependence	Other
48	2		4	1				3									
49	2	1	4	3													
50	1		8	11	2		6	5	7	4	3	12	10	9	13		trust 14
51	2			1	3							4					
52				1	3			2				2					
53	8	4	7	1		2	3		6		5						
54	2	8	3		5	4	9	7	6	1	11	10	12				
55	3	4			2		1										
56	3	2	4	1													
57	1		4			3	5				2						
58					1						2						
59	5	2	6		3		1			4							
62				1			6		2		3	4			5		
63	4	1			2				3								
65																1	
67		1				2											
71					1							1	2				
73					2							1				2	
74					2			1									
75					1												
76	2				1												
78												1				2	
79												1	2				
80	2				1						3						
81					3								2			1	
83					1								2				
84					1								2				
85					1							2					
86	3				1			2									
87			3		2						1			4			
88	3					1			2								
89					3		1	3					2				
90					1												
91					1								2				

Table 5.2: Results of well-being ranking exercise in focus groups

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Number	**Conceptualisations of well-being before widowhood ranked from highest to lowest importance** ***(those marked together with a (/) are of joint equal importance)***	**Conceptualisations of well-being after widowhood ranked from highest to lowest importance** ***(those marked together with a (/) are of joint equal importance)***
FGD 3	Family House Self-confidence Rights/basic needs Money Friends/communication Education Skills Love Voice Peace Health Religion	Money House Family Communication Self-confidence Rights/basic needs Friends Education Skills Love Voice Peace Health Religion
FGD 4	Money Family House Love Communication *(the group decided they just wanted to put down the first five)*	Friends Communication Voice Love House Family Rights Money Skills Education Health Self-confidence Basic needs Peace Religion

FGD 5	Love/house Health/basic needs Family/peace Money/religion Education Voice Self-confidence Communication Friends Rights Skills	Love/house Health/basic needs Peace/education Rights/religion Self-confidence Voice Communication Skills Friends/family/ money

(Source: researcher's data from focus groups)

Table 5.2 above also illustrates how elements of well-being shifted in ranking before and after widowhood, suggesting that conceptions of well-being often changed according to life-stage. Consequently the subsequent sections explore the myriad and overlapping ways in which aspects of material, perceptual and relational are critical to well-being, and how participants' conceptualisations changed according to the life-course, life-stages and social identities.

It should be noted that, although these ranking exercises provided great insight and were helpful in giving an overview of perceptions of well-being, they only provided a partial snapshot and were limited in explanation. By referring to extended conversations in oral histories and interviews, the forthcoming sections provide a more detailed and nuanced insight into how well-being was understood. Significantly, it was not only the aspects of well-being themselves which were important, but more the reasons why they were perceived as being so.

MATERIAL WELL-BEING: 'MORE THAN MONEY'

'Material well-being' commonly includes physical, tangible and quantifiable aspects of well-being "concerned with welfare and standards of living" (Wright, 2011b: 1462). In terms of material well-being, participants particularly stressed the significance of income and basic needs, home ownership, health and education (White, 2010). As explained further below, these are universally accepted objective necessities associated with well-being (Doyal and Gough, 1991). However, reasons behind why they are important, and the means by which these objective needs are achieved are often subjective and locally dependent; this refers to the previous discussion in *Chapter 2* about Doyal and Gough's (1991) theory on intermediate needs. As a result, this research explores the multiple and nuanced ways in which these material needs were considered to be important, and connections are made with perceptual and relational well-being. For example, while dimensions such as education are discussed within the sphere of material well-being, the influence that they had on relational and perceptual well-being will also be drawn out.

Basic Needs and Money

> "Well I have chosen basic necessities first as these are the things which I feel are the most important. If you don't have proper shelter, clothes and food how would it be possible to survive?" Anu (50, 40, Chhetri)

Food, water and shelter were understood as universal basic needs and objective aspects of well-being. The centrality of basic needs was echoed by Shova (50, 48, Brahman):

> *"For a man to have a good life, they don't need to be rich and have all sorts of expensive things around. You just need to have enough food to eat, and other basic needs and peace in your heart."*

Shova lived in rented accommodation and worked in a field near her home where she earned a daily wage for her labour. Given her meagre earnings as an agricultural worker, she perhaps struggled to fulfil her basic needs, thus contextualising her definition of well-being. Nonetheless, despite her circumstances, her understanding of well-being was not wholly material, as she also stressed the importance of *'peace in your heart'*. This illustrates the complexity of well-being, and how aspects of perceptual and more subjective aspects of well-being can be as critical as elements of material well-being.

Importantly, money and income were also identified as universal needs and objective dimensions of well-being. Participants in a focus group (see *Figure 5.2*) said that money had become more intrinsic to their well-being upon widowhood. They explained that when their husbands were alive, they had had financial support, and therefore money was not of much concern. However, upon the death of their husbands' their income had reduced, and subsequently money had become more important to them (Weiss, 1999 and Yadav, 2016).

The interrelation between basic needs and income was highlighted by Arya (44, 31, Chhetri) and Jogmaya (40, 39, Brahman). Arya lived in rented accommodation with her four children in Swayambhu. Although she was receiving external support from a foreign donor for her son's education, her income as a sex worker was not enough to support the rest of her children's education. Arya explained why money was important; *"without money life doesn't move on…you have to pay the rent and what if you can't."* Jogmaya also told me, *"without money, there is no food and shelter also. First is money. The first thing the world looks at is money."* Jogmaya lived in the district of Bhaktapur with her two

daughters (17 and 20 years old). Her daughters were nearing an age where they would be married, and Jogmaya was anxious about the related costs involved.

Yet, money and basic needs were critical for their expected and routine functions, but also for other more nuanced and subjective reasons. Securing income, and subsequently being able to secure basic needs, helped participants to gain respect, become independent, maintain relationships and it also provided security. This is corroborated by wider research, with Camfield (2006: 23 and 24) arguing that "material sufficiency was also valued, largely because it enabled people to be independent." Related to this, Indu (38, 31, Brahman) stated that money is essential "*because if you have money you would not need to ask anyone for anything"*. After getting to know Indu, I found that *"she was incredibly independent and did not want people to know about her problems",* although she would not explicitly admit this herself. (AFN: 03.03.14).

This attitude was not uncommon, and through my research it became increasingly evident that in Nepali culture "*asking for support can be perceived as a sign of weakness and dependency"* (AFN: 08.11.13). Notably, *Table 5.3* illustrates how widowed women would favour sleeping less, rather than asking for help. Dhana Maya (50, 44, Newar) who worked as a health worker further stated, *"I pray to god that I never face the situation where I have to borrow money from people"*. Anu (50, 40, Chhetri) also noted, *"it's good not to have to ask anyone for anything. Your hand should always be there to give rather than take so it makes you feel good"*. Indu, Dhana Maya and Anu were just three of many women who spoke of how they hoped *'to never have to ask anyone for anything'*. These women were all supporting themselves and their families and were likely to be perceived as capable women and hardworking mothers, thus they would have not wanted to be in a position where this perception, and thus their status, could have been

jeopardised. In addition, given their social status and lack of support from a male partner, widows may have already been perceived as potentially vulnerable and weak; thus they may have not wanted to exacerbate this perception by asking for help. Such pressures single women appeared to put on themselves to survive and succeed is reflected in their burden of responsibility (Brickell, and Chant, 2010; Jha and White, 2016) and in their altruistic nature. This altruism is unsurprising given the patriarchal structure within South Asia. Furthermore, the importance of being perceived as hardworking mothers also links to agency, and is highlighted further in *Chapter 6*.

Given this, not having to seek financial support or help in the form of food, water, shelter or money demonstrated strength and independence, and through this women were able to gain respect and status within the wider community. Bishnu Maya (85, 55, Newar) stated "*if you have money and you can manage on your own then people respect you. Today I have no money, no husband and my children don't respect me or care for me".* Bishnu Maya was an elderly widow who lived alone in a room in Ghattekulo with her pet tortoise. Although she owned her home, she could not afford electricity or water. Her children did not support her and were also trying to take her property away. This is significant as property is a central aspect of widow's well-being, but one in which they are also vulnerable to losing or are in conflict with their in-laws about. This also highlights how intergenerational relations can impede or support well-being.

Related to this, Jogmaya (40, 39, Brahman) further illustrated that money can also strengthen relationships, and subsequently help to maintain status within the community:

> *"There is also love in money…the relationships in the family will be different when there is money. The way her family and the community look at her will be different".*

Thus, a favourable economic situation also supports relational and perceptual well-being, as it does material well-being. As outlined in *Chapter 2*, in South Asia the material 'health' of the family is vital to a woman's status within the community, and therefore in supporting other aspects of her well-being (Thapan, 2003; Jha and White, 2016). Such perspectives further highlight the centrality of the family and community to women's well-being, especially within an Asian context (White, 2010).

Those who tended to place significant importance on basic needs and money were often those who appeared to be struggling, or had previously struggled, to fulfil their basic needs. Kanchi (24, 23, Nepali) stated:

> *"A good life for me means good food and nice clothes. If people have enough food and clothes, life is good for them. I don't know what other things are needed".*

Kanchi's perspective was further contextualised by understanding her current situation and past life experiences. She originated from a very remote part of Nepal called Jajarkot, so much so that until she moved to the Kathmandu Valley, a few months prior to the interview, she had never seen a car or a bus. Her parents struggled to support her and her siblings, and they later later died, leaving Kanchi an orphan. Her elder siblings took responsibility for her, and because of their difficulties she was married at 12 years old. She was not treated well by her first husband; she was forced to live in a cow shed outside her *ghar*. She eventually separated from him and remarried, but her second husband later died. When she became widowed the pastor in her local area arranged a job and accommodation for her in an orphanage in Lalitpur. At the time of interview she had recently moved there, and her life seemed happier and more comfortable. Exploring her multiple identities and understanding the challenges she had faced throughout her life-course helped to further contextualise her perceptions of well-being. Her experience also suggests how well-being and attitudes

towards well-being transfer over generations. Evidently her family struggled with poverty, and as a result of this Kanchi was unable to go to school and struggled to make a living as an adult, and these past life experiences have shaped her current perceptions of well-being. In this way it is clear that well-being transfers intergenerationally (see Wright, 2016).

Juna (60, 40, Brahman) also put basic needs as the most fundamental aspect of her well-being, perhaps because she previously struggled to provide for her family when her children were young. Although Juna's children were now adults, and she no longer needed to provide for them - in fact they supported her financially - this conception of well-being had remained with her. These examples echo the importance of considering a woman's life-course and wider temporality when documenting embedded conceptions of well-being (White, 2008; Wright, 2011a).

The connection between basic needs and a person's relative financial situation or class, was further explained by Ambika (34, 25, Brahman) who stated, "*for the people who live in slums for them a good life will be when they are able to get their basic needs of food, clothes and shelter".* In this way it seemed that conceptions of well-being varied according to an individuals situation. Despite her relatively well-paid job as a teacher, Mina (36, 30, Newar) expressed that money was currently the most critical aspect of her well-being:

> *"Money is the first thing because that is my current and most important need. Now after my son completes his 10th (grade at school), he will have to join higher education and look at how expensive it is. These days it is not like before when things were much affordable. My son is intelligent and good at his studies, but even then I won't be able to support him because I don't have enough money for his education and other basic needs."*

Mina was sufficiently fulfilling her and her son's basic needs, but wanted more money so her son (14 years old) could continue his secondary education and fulfil his capabilities as an intelligent and diligent student. As an educated woman herself, Mina would perhaps have wanted to create opportunities for her son that she had also previously benefitted from. This reiterates how Mina's and her son's life stage, and her educated background, shaped her conception of well-being. These extracts relate to the theory of 'adaptive preferences' and the notion that people's expectations relate to their current circumstances (White, 2009).

Property Ownership

Home ownership [64] was another aspect of material well-being repeatedly mentioned by participants (see *Table 5.1 and 5.2*). As discussed, property is a primary capital asset in Nepal, and it is of course an asset that contributes to intergenerational well-being. Given the high cost of land in the Kathmandu Valley, compared with other parts of Nepal, and the scarcity of land, buying or building a house is expensive and difficult. As a consequence of this, families who do not own properties may experience intergenerational poverty where each successive generation is unable to acquire their own property. Further to this, the inheritance of property to widowed women is still a contentious issue (see footnote 63 and *Chapter 4*), and therefore property is an asset widowed women are vulnerable to losing.

[64] Largely due to WHR's successful lobbying many of the discriminatory laws associated with property and inheritance have been changed, for example single women (widows) no longer need to wait till the age of 35 years to inherit deceased husband's property (WHR, 2016). As a consequence of this, more widowed women than ever own their own home. As depicted in *Figure 4.2*, most women live in owner occupied properties. However participants were only questioned about the type of property they lived in, issues around who specifically owned the property are not accounted for here.

While participants initially explained how home ownership was fundamental for its universal need and immediate function as a shelter, upon further discussion owning a home also emerged as more than a 'material' resource. Importantly, it was also a place of security, a means of gaining respect and a way of being rooted within a community. Given the multiple ways in which a home supported widow's well-being it is important to make the distinction between a house - as a more material and functional structure - and a home as a space where relationships can foster and identities can be established (Blunt, 2009).

Owning a home and land was a significant resource in that women could rent rooms to generate extra income or sell parts of their land if they needed capital (AFN: 17.10.13) (see Moser, 2007). Rooms in owned properties on the ground floor were sometimes used as shops, while land outside was used to grow vegetables. Given that a house is a financial asset and resource, like money and income, owning a home demonstrated wealth, success and security, and with that, fostered respect and status (Cramm et al., 2012). Sharda (45, 24, Newar) lived with her son, his wife and granddaughter in rented accommodation in Thamel where she also had a small souvenir stall. She expressed, "*if you own your own home people automatically respect you*". Importantly, her position as a tenant, rather than landowner, perhaps explained why she put a home as her first priority for a good life.

Those who owned their home benefitted from long-term security whereas tenants could be evicted at any time due to a lack of protection from laws and legal institutions (Wickeri, 2011); this partially encapsulates the differences between '*a house'* and '*a home'*. Related to this, widowed women often found it difficult to secure rented accommodation in the first instance, as potential landlords were sceptical about their ability to pay rent. Due to such discrimination, Rekha (45, 41, Pudasaini) was forced to squat on private land in Mulpani. There was also physical protection associated with home

ownership; participants within this research linked instances of sexual advances to their single status *and* the fact that they lived in rented properties (AFN: 14.03.14).

Some participants argued that owning a home enabled them to be more rooted in their community. Lila (58, 50 Chhetri) told us, *"it is easier for people who have homes. For us, living in rented accommodation, some neighbourhoods could be nice and some would not be good."* Here Lila was implying that communities were not necessarily always positive towards those who were renting. Through further conversations with Lila, and living in the Kathmandu Valley more generally, I realised that areas are, to varying extents, spatially segregated according to caste and ethnicity (see *Chapter 4*). People of different ethnicities and castes have resided in specific areas for decades, and own properties that have been passed down through the generations (Moffat and Finnis, 2005). Thus, those who are 'local' to an area may be of a certain caste, ethnicity and religion while those who rent are perhaps of differing demographics. As such, participants who were tenants might not have been as 'embedded' in the community and depicted, to varying degrees, as 'outsiders'. This can inhibit their inclusion within the community, and by extension limit their stores of social capital and their class mobility (Moffat and Finnis, 2005; Wagle, 2006). The speculative housing market and the growing property bubble is arguably perpetuating the divisions between those who own properties and those who rent (Sharma, 2016) (see also Desai and Loftus, 2013), making it more difficult for these families to ever acquire property. This importantly highlights the significance of intergenerational transfers in the shaping of poverty and well-being.

Whilst owning a home was seen as being central to well-being, a participant in a focus group also explained that it was essential to have a family to live in that home:

> *"What we understand is we need a house but we can't live alone in that house…once we are dead we can't keep the keys to our house. If we have no one our brothers (in-law) will take the house. They will take the house that we built with such hardships for free. That is why we need a family." (Participant 2, FGD 5)*

Such a perspective detailed that it is not only important to have a *house*, but to have a family of one's own to live in, and subsequently inherit, that *home*. This perspective suggests how family and 'home' are in some way mutually constitutive. Furthermore, it also demonstrates that relational elements of well-being, such as having a family, are as central as material aspects. This reiterates the common theme within this research aspects of material, perceptual and relational well-being are all interlinked, and that constructions of well-being are often framed in relation to others, and especially the family (Jha and White, 2016; Thapan, 2003).

Evidently property ownership is a central asset in Nepal and one that fostered women's well-being in a number of nuanced ways. However, this research discovered that property disputes were common and widowed women were vulnerable to being dispossessed of their property by their siblings, adult children, children in-law or their parents in-law. As detailed previously, although Dhan Jumari (76, 50, Brahman) and Bishnu Maya (85, 55, Newar) had been able to retain their properties, their relationships with their children had been jeopardised. Bishnu Maya particularly felt vulnerable as a consequence of her children's actions, and lonely as a result of their neglect.

Education

Connected in varying ways to income is education. As seen in *Table 5.1,* women felt that education was integral to their well-being. In addition,

although not as frequently mentioned, skills, and employment[65] are also inextricably linked to education, and therefore will also be discussed here. Tulasha's (46, 39, Brahman) husband disappeared seven years ago and while she was not certain that he was dead, she self-identified as a widow. She had primary school education and worked as the local group coordinator for WHR; her employment as a social worker therefore had perhaps shaped her conceptualisation. Tulasha outlined the connection between education, employment and income; and stated that she had always felt that education was the most critical aspect of her well-being:

> *"If we are educated, then we can get a job in good position and in a good place. If we get this good job then we automatically have a good life as our income will be good. So I feel that education is the most important thing to have a good life."*

Widowed women also spoke of how education, and subsequent employment, were essential for building confidence and independence (Jha and White, 2016), thus enabling them to combat discrimination they may have faced as widowed women. The following extract from an interview with Ambika (34, 25, Brahman) exemplified this:

> *"If we have a job we can take decisions for ourselves. In this way we will gain a sense of self-respect and confidence. But for an uneducated or less educated single woman it is obviously hard. She will have to depend upon her family, and sometimes also be physically or mentally abused because she is dependent upon them. Because I am educated and confident I had the courage to stand up for myself and maintain a positive attitude, had I not been educated I would have to stay with my husband's family listen to their tantrums".*

[65] In Nepal there is a distinction between types of work and whether they are considered as 'jobs'. 'Having a job' generally implies employment that is non-manual, formal and has some kind of security – these are normally in the private or Government sector. Running a shop, working in the field and producing handicrafts are considered as employment, but not necessarily considered as 'jobs' (AFN: 19.09.13).

Being literate encouraged a woman's confidence, but also ensured she was not vulnerable to betrayal. As Tulasha (46, 39, Brahman) stated:

> *"We will have a good life when we are educated and no one can betray us with documents written in English or Nepali. If we are educated, no one will be able to betray us."*

This is particularly pertinent since widows, and especially older widows, can be tricked out of their rightful inheritance and property, by their children, siblings or in-laws, due to a lack of education and awareness of their rights (Key informant interview: WHR) (see *Chapter 4*). Older women who had not had the privilege of education stressed the freedom and independence that education could inspire. They explained that being able to read would help them to be independent and to travel to places without fear. Lily (69, 55, Brahman) worked in a shop in Mulpani and detailed how her illiteracy made her nervous to travel alone.

The characteristics of being independent and self-confident that education, skills and employment encouraged, also consequently provided women with a certain social standing and respect within the family and wider community (see Amirtham, 2011; Lamichhane, 2012; Sen, 1990). As Juna (60, 40, Brahman) stated "*until you have a job people do not respect you*". At the time of interview Juna was not working and her children were supporting her, prior to this she worked at a garment factory.

Being engaged in employment and the associated responsibilities also acted as a comfort, relieving women from their bereavement. Indra (55, 45, Newar) spoke of how her job making bead necklaces helped her:

> *"It is very different for employed and unemployed widows. If the widowed woman were working, she would not have much time to think about her husband's demise. Employment keeps her mind*

occupied. When you wake up in the morning, thoughts about your past go around your head, and when you are employed you think that I have a pending job, I am running late and then your mind is diverted towards your work."

Evidently, education and employment underpin various aspects of women's well-being, including independence, relief from grief, confidence and respect (Thapan, 2003). Those who particularly emphasised the importance of education tended to be educated up to at least grade 10 (ages 14 to 16) (see *Appendix 1)*. These participants had been able to exercise the benefits of their education, and many were actively involved in education either as teachers, training to become teachers or social workers. These women also, generally, tended to be younger as only a few older women had the privilege of education.

Yet employment and education did not always appear to strengthen well-being. Some women spoke of how their educated background had incited suspicion within their marital home, such that if they were educated it was perceived that they would not want to fulfil their domestic duties. Others stated how their engagement with education caused them to be ridiculed. Indira (55, 37, Newar) who was attending adult education classes explained how her sisters in-law teased her saying "*what will you do with education now…become a doctor or something*". They could not understand why she needed to attend these classes and thought she was just going there to *"gossip"*. Nonetheless, it was generally understood that skills, employment and education supported well-being, not only material but also perceptual and relational well-being.

Health

Tables 5.1 and *5.2,* and further conservations in interviews and oral histories, demonstrated that health was perceived as integral to well-

being. Although it could be positioned as an aspect of perceptual or relational well-being, it is perhaps most appropriately discussed within material well-being. Given the poor public health system in Nepal, healthcare is often considered as a luxury for those who can afford it, and in this way it can be initially considered as 'material'.

Widowed women detailed that they wanted to be healthy for the immediate benefits that it would bring, but also because it would help them to fulfill their potential. Ambika (34, 25, Brahman) explained, if you are healthy "*you can perform well and achieve what you desire"*. This is reiterated by Birmaya (43, 28, Newar) "*if you have good health you can do anything you want*". These statements suggest that good health can bestow women with independence and freedom. An extract from an interview with Anu (50, 40, Chhetri) further explained this, *"health is important because then you won't have to depend on anybody for anything"*.

Related to this, participants wanted to be healthy to avoid being treated as weak and being pitied. Thaukura (61, NA, Chhetri) explained *"I want to have good health, so that even if I am dying people may not feel sorry for me"*. Thaukura further expressed that she had been ill for the past three or four years and that her doctors had been unable to do anything for her, as a consequence of this, she said her confidence had decreased. This reiterates the common desire not to be pitied or be perceived as being weak, and subsequently reinforces the importance of maintaining respect and status within the community, and thus relatedness, to wider conceptions of well-being.

Older widows tended to stress the priority of health, whereas younger women seemed less concerned. This was understandable as older women were approaching a time in their life where they were affected by increasing health issues or were more anxious about the

implications of potential health issues. As Prapti (50, 43, Newar) explained, *"once you come of age (become older), health is what matters most"*. Debaki (66, 57, Brahman) stated:

> *"The most important for me in all of these things is good health. If you are healthy you can do everything and you won't have to look at anybody for anything. If you are unhealthy you will have to look up to everyone for help and support. So I feel health is the most important.*

Further reiterating the importance of health, Chandra Kala (62, 46, Brahman) stressed, *"when you are older health is everything"*. Chandra Kala was forced to sell her tea-shop, and consequently give up her financial independence, as she could no longer continue to cook there due to the severity of her asthma. She lived alone, but ate meals at her daughter's home nearby. These examples illustrate how life-stage, in this case older age, influenced conceptions of well-being. Having detailed various aspects related to material well-being, and the complex linkages with other elements of well-being, the next section moves on to focus on perceptual well-being.

PERCEPTUAL WELL-BEING: 'THE SELF AND THE RELATIONAL'

> *"The assurance of salvation after my death is my first priority. I have found god and that is my first priority." Romita (60, 48, Sunuwar)*

Romita, a 'lower' caste widow, converted to Christianity 25 years prior to interview; since then her faith in God has been the most central aspect of her well-being. This following section explores key elements contributing to well-being which could be largely categorised as 'perceptual'; these include self-confidence, independence and faith, which I consider in turn below. It should be noted that whilst these are discussed within the context of perceptual well-being, relational life is

closely linked to, and in some ways part of the perceptual domain and vice versa. This reiterates the ways in which material, perceptual and relational well-being are highly interlinked.

(Self)-confidence

Self-confidence was key to participants' perceptual well-being (see *Appendix 1* and *Table 5.1*), partly due to the fact that it underpinned other critical elements. As such, widowed women suggested how self-confidence helped with providing comfort, positive reinforcement and independence, knowing right from wrong and for avoiding discrimination. Women explained how life and getting by would be 'impossible' without self-confidence. Kamana (48, 46, Newar), an educated Christian widow who worked for a micro-credit organisation, spoke about how she gained confidence through her work, which gave her an opportunity to visit new places and meet new people. She later stressed how she *"could not live without self-confidence".* When asked how her perceptions of well-being changed upon widowhood Kamana stated, *"I never thought of what a good life was before as he was always with me".* Given the increased responsibility upon widowhood and their new roles within their households, widowed women perhaps had to think about their well-being, and their families well-being, more directly.

Similarly illustrating how life would be impossible without self-confidence Tara Devi (54, 46, Chhetri) detailed:

> *"If I didn't have the tolerance, patience and confidence in myself then maybe I would not be living today. My sons are doing well and I have patience in myself, these things are needed to have confidence."*

She explained how she increased her confidence by thinking positively and by giving herself positive encouragement and reinforcement about what she was doing. Others stressed how self-confidence enabled them to fulfil their potential and act on an idea or plan that they thought was beyond their capabilities. Jaya Kali (28, 26, Brahman) noted, *"you need self-confidence...you can do anything if you have it. It gives you the strength to do things that you think you are not capable of".* Jaya Kali lived with her three young children in Mulpani. The main source of her self-confidence was her faith; she was a devout Hindu and gained confidence, she told us, by reading religious texts and attending sermons.

In addition, women also stated that self-confidence helped them to know if a plan or action they were undertaking was *"right or wrong"* (Iswari, 26, 22, Brahman). Talking about this in the context of her employment, Iswari explained that prior to her husband's death, her work was limited to the *ghar*. However, when he died she needed to provide for her daughter and her parents in-law and found a job in a pharmaceutical factory. She spoke of how going to work was a big step for her and that she was quite anxious about it initially. Nonetheless, she was able to pursue her employment, as she knew she doing was 'the right thing' for her in-laws, her daughter and for herself (see Jha and White, 2016 on importance of family to women's well-being).

Associated with self-confidence was positive reinforcement. Some women explained how they felt confident when they decided upon an action and subsequently, succeeded in that action. The resultant positive experiences gave them self-confidence. Shanti (33, 24, Newar) stressed, *"when things are going well and giving positive results then this gives me self-confidence"*. Shanti worked as a cleaner in a hospital in the Chapagaun area of Lalitpur. She spoke of how being able to send her son to school and fulfill his desires, and thus satisfy her role as a mother, helped her to feel confident.

Self-confidence also enabled women like Ambika (34, 25, Brahman) to be focused and resilient in the face of discrimination. Through her confidence, she was able to stand up to her in-laws and know that leaving the patrilocal home, something which is culturally difficult to do (see *Chapter 6*), was the right decision for her and her son:

> *"I have learnt to have confidence with my decisions and to know what is right and what is wrong for me and my son. I took the decision to leave my husband's house, no woman leaves her husband house easily, there has to be certain conflict to do so. I had to take that step, if I was not confident I couldn't have done that."*

These examples illustrate that widowed women increased their confidence in a number of ways. For example, through relationships with their children, friends and family, fulfilling their responsibilities, work, education, recreational activities, involvement with community groups and their faith. However, participants particularly expressed how they gained confidence through their children and their happiness and successes. As Yashoda (40, 33, Newar) stated, *"I feel confident when my children are healthy, happy and doing well at school"*. Yashoda ran a *kirana pasal* in Thimi where she lived with her two children aged 17 and 19 years. Narbada (28, 24, Newar) reiterated this, explaining that if her daughter was accepted into a specific school that *'would make her happy and definitely increase her self-confidence'*.

The confidence gained through children, and fulfilling responsibilities as mothers, suggests that for Nepali widows, confidence is highly relational. Confidence seemed just as dependent on those close to an individual, predominantly their children and family, as it was on individuals themselves. These relational notions of confidence may be attributed to, and shaped by, widely accepted gendered constructions of what it means to be confident. Orthodox notions of self-confidence could attribute it as a masculine characteristic, therefore confidence,

especially in patriarchal countries like Nepal, is not commonly seen as a female characteristic nor is it necessarily encouraged amongst women.

Although participants did not directly identify confidence as being an unfeminine trait, they often conceptualised it in a relational way that was centred on the typically 'feminine' sphere of family and child rearing. Illustrating the importance of family to women's well-being in India, Thapan (2003: 78) states that well-being "depends not only a woman's sense of herself as an individual, but on her relationship with others in her extended family and community". Therefore, given that women's well-being is often sought through wider familial well-being, confidence was also sought in this way (White et al., 2010). Thus a relational understanding was perhaps one that women could connect to more, and one that was more likely to be accepted amongst them.

Finding confidence through relatedness somewhat connects to Deshmuhk-Ranadive's (2005) analysis on women's empowerment within South Asian households, which details how women gained confidence through collectives and group interaction. The consequent effect relationships and groups can have on empowerment and agency will be discussed further in *Chapter 6*. Such understandings of confidence are also more appropriate for Asian cultures that value family and community, over individual self-interest (Brickell and Chant, 2010). For these reasons *confidence* is perhaps more appropriate than *self-confidence*, as confidence seemed to be largely derived from others and not the *self*.

Primarily, younger women stressed the significance of confidence as illustrated by the fact that the average age of those who ranked confidence in their top three determinants for a good life was 44, whereas the average age of participants generally was 49 (see *Appendix 1*). There are a number of reasons why young women could have

perceived confidence as being more critical to well-being. Given the suspicion that they can incite within the marital home and the wider community, and the fact that older women tended to be more respected within society generally (see *Chapter 4*), young widows perhaps had a greater need for confidence. Compounding these potential difficulties, younger women often had more significant financial and emotional pressures associated with providing for their family, adopting more of their husbands' roles. Thus they might have simultaneously embraced more traditionally 'masculine' characteristics such as confidence. Furthermore, with increasing gender equality it has perhaps become more acceptable for women to be 'confident', and it is largely amongst the younger generations where such changes are most prominent and most accepted. Young women also tended to be more actively involved in women's and widow's groups who regularly discuss issues associated with confidence and independence.

Independence

Related in many ways to confidence was independence, as Urmila (66, 62, Brahman) explained, *"if I have self belief then I can be independent"*. Urmila lived on an informal housing settlement next to Bagmati River with her son, daughter in-law and granddaughter. Like Urmila, many other participants highlighted a connection between confidence and independence, and as a result many reasons put forward as to why independence was implicit to well-being were mirrored within those associated with confidence. For example, it was explained that independence was essential for fulfilling potential, positive reinforcement, knowing right from wrong and averting discrimination. Yet, some participants did distinguish between confidence and independence. To this end, Nirmala (57, 53, Brahman), who lived with her newly married son and his wife in Mulpani, expressed *"confidence is*

the courage within you to do things", whereas *"independence is not being held back or not being in someone's control"*.

Although it does not feature predominantly in the specific well-being ranking (*Table 5.1*), the importance of independence, and not being 'dependent' upon anyone, was reiterated in conversations in interviews and oral histories. Instead of referring to the term 'independence' explicitly, participants often explained how a good life was one *'where they did not have to ask others for help'* (see above also in relation to material well-being). Yet others, such as Sabita (50, 25, Chhetri) who lived with her children in Phutung where she worked polishing marble, did directly mention independence in their definitions of a good life:

> *"Life is good for me as long as I am able to work for myself. If I have to rely on anybody else then my life is not good. Life is good as along as I am independent."*

Notably as detailed in *Chapter 4,* Sabita spoke of how her well-being had improved since her husband's death. She also stressed how her future well-being would depend on her being able to continue her work and whether her children would support her. When asked about her perceptions of well-being before her husband passed away, Sabita stated that she did not think about what well-being meant to her before, and it was through gaining independence after widowhood that she started to think about well-being. Indu (38, 31, Brahman) expressed the importance of independence to her; *"a good life is where I could live according to my will, wear things I want to wear, eat what I want and go where I want".* As stated previously, Indu was self-employed as a tailor in Mulpani, and reported that she felt she had more independence and freedom upon widowhood (see *Chapter 4;* Chant, 2007). Such desires for independence support Sen's (1985) theorisation's on 'functionings' and 'capabilities' in that an individual needs the more material aspects of well-being enabling them to 'function', but also the 'capabilities' and independence to reach that state of well-being. Therefore, in this

respect material aspects of well-being are underpinned by those such as independence.

While stressing its significance to well-being, Dhan Jumari (76, 56, Brahman) suggested that when being independent people should also be considerate of the wider community:

> *"Nothing is better than being independent. If you are independent you don't have to ask for anything. You will be solely responsible for what you do and what you eat. There will be clash between two dependent people. You can live your life without any disturbances if you are independent…but your independence shouldn't harm your social norms and values."*

Additionally Nirmala (57, 53, Brahman) stated, "*it is good to be independent but you shouldn't go around doing anything in the name of independence".* She further illustrated this by detailing her own experience; "*I am independent, but I don't cross my boundaries. I don't do whatever I feel like doing. I am independent, yet I am bound".* From getting to know Nirmala, I found that she was a quiet and shy individual, who did not want to bring unnecessary attention to herself within her immediate community and within the wider society.

Such perceptions suggest that, akin to confidence, there was also a relational notion of independence, one where people were mindful of other individuals, the community and society more broadly. This again reflects Brickell and Chant's (2010) previous observation about Asian values favouring collective over individual interests. Nirmala's and Dhan Jumari's 'older' physiological age and 'high' caste identities could have also shaped their more traditional understandings of independence that were chiefly concerned with adhering to societal norms and expectations.

Similarly, Srijana (40, 27, Chhetri) felt that independence was about the capacity to support others:

> *"Independence is being able to do your own work by yourself, being able to help someone, console them and show them the right path. Or if a woman has gone through hardship, being able to help her by saying something positive so she can gain self-confidence and self-belief in herself. I think if I am able to do all these, then I can be an independent person."*

In this sense for Srijana, independence was when people were not only able to look after themselves, but when they could also help and support others. To this end, highlighting how too much independence may result in selfishness towards others Sunita (34, 24, Newar) explained, *"those who are too independent may only think about themselves, and not bother about others"*. Sunita was the WHR coordinator for the district of Bhaktapur; when asked she explained how she gained her independence through her work as a tailor.

Therefore, it appears that understandings of independence were highly relational, with certain 'types' of independence being more accepted than others. The type of independence commonly reiterated by participants related specifically to being independent while also being considerate of others and – perhaps paradoxically – adhering to societal gendered rules and etiquette. This supports Wray's (2004: 23) observation that, "it is possible to be dependent without this posing a threat to autonomous or independent action and to be empowered and disempowered at the same time". Such a perspective also helps to explain how women may simultaneously *conform* and *resist* to gendered cultural practices, and illustrate the need for a more relational notion of agency (see *Chapter 6*). This notion of independence reiterates the critical importance of relationships with the family, community and wider society in shaping women's well-being (Jha and White, 2016). Furthermore, like confidence, gendered norms associated with independence largely perceive it as a male characteristic; thus, a

more relational understanding was also one that was likely to be more accepted amongst women.

Faith

Faith was commonly identified as being intrinsic to perceptual well-being (see *Appendix 1* and *Table 5.1*), and is recognised within wider scholarly by Devine and White (2013) and White et al. (2010). At the outset it is important to reiterate that research participants perceived 'faith' in a multitude of ways: as religion, as a trust shared between people, as mindfulness, as charity and as confidence. However, it was faith in the milieu of religion that was most commonly expressed. Participants explained how faith underpinned other aspects of well-being such as confidence, happiness, comfort, and peace, and also supported the resolution of problems and building positive karma (White et al., 2010).

The emotional suffering and subsequent stress of losing their husband, compounded with the potential discrimination associated with their widowed status, meant that for some women religion was a significant support. Nanda (56, 52, Newar), a Hindu woman, spoke of how her faith had helped her since the death of her husband:

> *"When I feel really sad or restless I go to the temple, sing the songs in god's name and do my prayers. It makes me feel calm and peaceful, and that makes me really happy. When I remember him (her husband) and I feel like crying I always go there to sit and sing songs. This makes me forget all my problems, and when I am there I feel that I will find a solution soon."*

Whilst there were various socio-cultural restrictions in terms of religious practice within the first year of mourning (see *Chapters 1* and *6*), some widowed women like Nanda explained how their faith had

become more critical to their well-being upon widowhood. Sajita (66, 20, Newar), a Hindu, detailed how when she was married she did not give any thought to what a good life meant to her, but that faith was now central to her well-being. She then detailed how religion and her faith in god helped her to solve her problems; *"I have faith in religion. I think of god in all my worries and problems so that he'll help me get out of the problem"*. During both an interview and an oral history, Sajita sang traditional religious songs; in this way we were able to witness her devotion and the importance of her faith. Komal (28, N/A, Kolange), a Christian woman who worked in a shoe factory further stressed:

> *"I feel god is always with me and supporting me. I think it is because of my prayers that my son got the opportunity to stay in a hostel[66] (Komal's sons accommodation and schooling was being sponsored by a Christian Organisation). It was not something that everybody gets. When I am alone and depressed, I pray and I feel god is with me. I feel that god is a stronger support to me than people are."*

Religious engagement and faith in god brought widowed women confidence, hope and reassurance. In Komal's case her religious practice also, arguably, facilitated the support she received for her son's education (see Galvin, 2005). Related to this, women also felt that practicing their faith could bring them positive future benefits or karma. Jaya Kali (28, 26, Brahman), a Hindu stated, *"if you believe in god then he will do something for you. Even if there is suffering now, you can hope he will do something better for you".* In addition, it became evident that acting piously was not only about having faith in god, but about being charitable, supportive and helpful towards others, which could also subsequently encourage the development of positive karma. The influence fate and karma have on agency will be discussed further in *Chapter 6*.

[66] A hostel is a residential home for children who attend a school nearby. The children will live in the hostel during term time, and return home in the holidays.

Faith and religious practice were also seen as a type of recreation, allowing women to take a break from their everyday work and socialise. Participants explained how they enjoyed going to religious groups, to visit temples and pilgrimage sites in Nepal and India. Indu (38, 31, Brahman) spoke of how she enjoyed attending the monthly *bhajans*[67] in her community and visiting temples:

> *"A few days ago we went on a religious tour to Halesi (a religious temple in the Eastern part of Nepal) and I told everyone about you guys (Arya and I) and I was very happy. It was fun and we talked a lot."*

Given limited hobbies - partly due to a lack of finance and the opportunity to engage in them - women explained how religious activities offered an opportunity for socialising. Religious spaces were also sites where social and community bonds were reinforced, where friendships developed and where women engaged in ceremonies that gave them social standing in community, therefore supporting their relational well-being. In Nepal, religious practice is highly gendered and it is often women who are responsible for the religious health of the wider family; thus it is they who frequently visit temples and engage in pujas (Bose, 2010; White et al., 2010).

In turn, religious activities were particularly important for widowed woman. Given that they can often incite suspicion in certain public places, and during specific social events, religious pursuits were a legitimate and socially accepted reason for them to reside in these places and attend these events. Iswari (26, 22, Brahman) detailed how she felt the temple was the only place she could go without her husband, and without being questioned. Indu (38, 31, Brahman) further

[67] A *bhajan* is a Hindu religious devotional song. *Bhajan* groups often meet in the evening after the working day where devotees sing, dance and play instruments together.

explained how she was able to justify going to the local evening[68] *bhajan* to her children because it was for a 'religious cause'.

Therefore, religious engagement was fundamental to well-being, especially in a pious and fatalistic country like Nepal. Faith, and the consequent enactment of religious activities, encouraged confidence, the resolution of problems, provided comfort, helped to foster positive karma, contributed to happiness, provided a means of social engagement and peace of mind. What is interesting, but not explicitly explored within this research, is the extent to which religion shapes perceptions of what a good life is and how it should be lived. As White et al. (2010: 3) contend, religion "provides a core grounding for discourses on wellbeing, specifying through teaching and practice what it means to live well, as an individual and as a community".

To further contextualise these conceptions of well-being, it is important to correlate well-being ranking with intersectional identities (see *Appendix 1*). Looking specifically at faith there does not seem to be any distinct patterns between understandings of well-being and intersectional identities, yet from further conversations and discussions in interviews, older and Christian women particularly stressed the importance of religion and faith. Older women were more likely to stress the significance of faith and religion to their well-being for a number of reasons. First, older people tended to be more interested in conserving traditions and related religious practices (see *Chapter 6*). Second, they were less likely to be working and occupied with childcare, and thus had more time to devote to religious practice[69]. Related to this, religious activities are a legitimate and 'appropriate' way in which older people can socialise. Third, since they were nearing

[68] It is not perceived as being safe or culturally appropriate for women to go out alone at night.

[69] This is not to say that older women did not contribute to childcare; there were many older women within this research who were responsible for looking after their grandchildren.

the end of their life, they were maybe more concerned with securing a positive afterlife and good health in the reminder of this life – hence their religious interest (see Lamb, 2000).

Christian widows of varying ages also stressed the importance of religion. Romita (60, 48, Sunuwar) introduced at the start of this section, detailed that her faith was central to her well-being. As discussed in *Chapter 4,* many people from 'lower' caste groups have converted to Christianity to seek refuge from discrimination within the Hindu caste system and sometimes for financial support, illustrating that faith was not merely essential for perceptual well-being, but also for material well-being. However, this does not necessarily mean that the benefits of Christianity were limited to this, as participants also found peace, comfort and community from their religious pursuits. Rina (21, 19, Bika) was a 'lower' caste widow and did not receive any support from any Christian based organisations, but spoke of how going to church made her feel *"peaceful"* and how she was *'able to meet her friends there'*.

As evidenced at various points in this section, widows' perceptions of perceptual well-being were highly relational. Whether talking about self-confidence or independence, connections with children, family and communities were identified as being significant. It is to these relational aspects of well-being to which I now turn.

RELATIONAL WELL-BEING: FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP

> *"Others' happiness is your own happiness. Isn't it? Let's say you return from here very sad, that will make me think 'why are they sad – what did I do'. If you go back happy, I feel happy too. Others' happiness is your own happiness." Indu (38, 31, Brahman)*

In this extract Indu detailed the centrality of relationships to well-being; White (2008: 8) supports this, "people become who and what they are in and through their relatedness to others". This is especially true within South Asia where relatedness, with the family and wider community, is implicit to happiness and well-being, and especially women's well-being (Jha and White, 2016).

This section details and explains the most significant aspects of relational well-being as specified by Nepali widows, including family, children and friendship. Evidently, these relationships were themselves underpinned by love and peace. Iswari (26, 22 Brahman) noted, *"to survive you need love amongst each other"*. As evidenced in *Appendix 1,* Iswari felt that love was critical to her well-being. The reciprocal and relational nature of love was expressed by Rina (21, 19, Bika) who stressed; *"if we give love then we will also get love in return…with love and care we will be able to make friends and take care of everybody"*. It seems that the notions of love within this research did not explicitly refer to love in the context of an intimate partner, but more of a love shared between family, friends and the wider community.

Family and Children

It became apparent that family, and relationships with family members, were intrinsic to well-being (see White et al., 2010; Jha and White, 2016). This was particularly evident within some of the PRA activities, where participants detailed that many of the issues they faced as widows, for example, the burden of time, loneliness and discrimination could be resolved through help from their family members (see *Table 5.3*).

Table 5.3: Problem/solution chart FGD 3 Lalitpur[70]

Problem	**Short term solution**	**Longer term solution**	**Who can help**
Burden of time	-sleep less rather than asking for help	-training -income generation	-daughter in-law -family
Money	-working more in field -accessing loan	-training -income generation	-local WHR group
Violence	-ask Village Development Committee (VDC) for help	-direct issues to higher level	-SAATHI Nepal -local WHR group
Discrimination	-close friends -family and society	-education in communities	
Loneliness	-talk to friends -children and grandchildren -TV/radio	-wider support of family and community towards widowed women	
Accessing rights as single women	-VDC -younger single women	-education to understand rights	-social mobilisers to facilitate this help

(Source: participants' data from focus group)

Notably, some women spoke of how they previously focused their well-being around material things such as clothes and items for the home; but since their husbands had died, they did not have the same concern for such material items and their family had consequently become more important to them. Indra (55, 45, Newar) who lived with her two children in a Newari community in central Kathmandu stressed, "*I know money is a very important thing, but after my husband passed away I have realised that family and their support matters a lot*". However,

[70] I typed this up in a table, as the original written copy was difficult to read.

others had always felt their family was most intrinsic part of their well-being. When asked what a good life meant to her Shasi (48, 47, Brahman) stated; *"living together with the family, it's only good when everyone is together.* Shasi explained how her perception of well-being had been the same before her husband's demise. Similarly Neeru (43, 40, Brahman) stated, "*my concerns are the same. I am not concerned about anything except my children's future*". Such extracts highlight that regardless of the change in their marital status, women's well-being was predominantly centred around their family, and especially their children.

As discussed in *Chapter 2,* women in patriarchal countries can be particularly altruistic towards their children, which is perhaps why their conceptions of well-being are framed around them (Brickell and Chant, 2010). Saraswati (44, 34, Newar) who had five children between the ages of 16 and 25 illustrated this:

> *"A good life for me is one where my children are happy and healthy. All the responsibility and hardships I have, it is for them. So in their happiness I will also feel happy."*

She went on to describe her relationship with them:

> *"I feel my children and I, we act like friends. I still feel I can do anything for my children. I have treated both my daughter and son equally. I am the same around them as I am my friends".*

When asked, Saraswati said her conceptualisation of well-being had been the same before her husband passed away. In order to support her family, she worked in fields close to her home. Although her husband had worked as a teacher, he had not been working long enough for her to receive his pension. Such perceptions relate to research by Thapan (2003) and White et al. (2010) that situate the importance of family and children to women's well-being within Hindu cultures. A participant in

White et al.'s study (2010: 22) stated, "according to our Hindu faith a woman's happiness lies in her family being happy".

Given this, the question is posited as to why children were critical to widows' well-being. Within this research it became evident that children provided comfort in times of grief, a focus, a reason to carry on and friendship. Many detailed how focusing and thinking about their children gave them the internal strength they needed to continue with their lives, therefore supporting their perceptual well-being. As discussed previously, women detailed how they sought confidence through their children and fulfilling their responsibilities towards them. Kamala (56, 47, Chhetri) expressed, *"when you have a child you tend to think them as your responsibility and struggle for them"*. Kamala lived with her daughter in-law, Kaili (27, 27, Chhetri), who was also widowed. Kamala was visibly upset throughout the interview, it seemed she was upset about her husband, but more so the recent death of her son.

A woman's responsibilities for her children helped to take her mind off her grief and anxieties (White et al., 2010). Kaili who had a five-year-old daughter, noted:

> "*For a single woman (widow) it is easier to pass the time if she has a child. Many negative things would have come into my mind if I did not have her. I have to spend the whole morning getting her ready for school. After that I go to college and get busy with the household work. She comes back at three, so I have to get some snacks ready for her and help her with the homework. Thanks to her I don't have much time to think negatively."*

Not only were children an emotional support, but they also provided material well-being. *Chapters 2* and *4* illustrated the reliance parents can have on their children, especially upon ageing (see Desai and Tye, 2009; Lamb, 2013 and 2015). Due to the demise of their husbands, widowed woman had fewer options for their current and future

subsistence, thus children then became more central to their material well-being. Srijana (40, 27, Chhetri) spoke of how she expected to reciprocate the support she had given to her children in the future:

> *"Basically we need to have our own family so that our children earn well, do good and take care of us. After my husband passed away, it was hard and I struggled to bring them up and provide them with all the things they needed. So when they grow up, they must treat us nicely, love us, care for us and earn well."*

Srijana ran a teashop in Phutung and lived with her daughter and daughter in-law; she received remittances from her son who was working in Malaysia. Emphasising the support she anticipated that she would receive from her children, Gyani (46, 45, Newar) also stated, *"our children want us to help them in any way we can and we also expect them to support us in future"*. Such expectations and consequent conceptions of well-being were shaped by intersectional identities and life-course. Both Srijana and Gyani were at a stage in their lives where their children had newly reached adulthood and started working, thus the responsibility and pressure concerning care was shifting, or had shifted, to their children. This emphasises the way in which temporality, life-course and life stage, of both the widow herself and her family members, shape conceptions of well-being.

The presence of children within the family also helped widowed women to secure their rightful property. Although many of the discriminatory laws restricting widowed women from inheriting their husbands' property have been revoked, in-laws were not always supportive of them inheriting it (Key informant interview: WHR). Securing property seemed to be especially difficult if a widow was childless, as her in-laws did not understand why she needed to claim the property if she did not have anyone to pass it on to. This highlights the ways in which intergenerational relations can either support or impede well-being.

Children also potentially strengthened relationships and connections between a widowed woman and her in-laws, making the experience of living in the patrilocal home, and relationships between family members, more positive. Therefore, children helped to reinforce other familial relationships. Notably, as explained in *Chapter 1,* when a woman is married she is not only married to her husband, but also to her patrilocal home and her family in-law (Chen and Drèze, 1992; Lamb, 2000). The following extract from an interview with Jyoti (36, 35, Bhujel) exemplified the importance of children in this context:

> *"The child will be of their blood too. They think that even though they do not have their son, they have a part of their son in the form of his children. They also have an attachment with us due to this. If a widow has no children, they will tend to ignore her or dominate her. So having and not having a child makes a difference. I think had I not had a daughter, I would not have had this sort of relationship. They call me over to their place saying that they want to see her."*

Jyoti's marriage was a love and inter-caste marriage, which could have caused potential difficulties upon widowhood (see *Chapter 4*). However, as explained, her daughter strengthened the connection to, and relationships within, the marital home. Narbada (28, 24, Newar) who also had a young daughter (5 years old) and lived with her in-laws similarly stated:

> *"I feel they (her parents in-law) would be a bit different or less supportive if I didn't have a child…and the thing is the house would have eaten me up. My husband, his memories and the times we spent together would kill me. So my daughter helps me to be at peace in this house and stay here".*

For Narbada, having a daughter helped her to cope with living in her in-laws' home without her husband, and reinforced her relationship with her parents in-law. Without children widowed women have little connection to that family and little reason to stay there, but according to the expectations associated with widowhood, they were expected to

continue to live within their marital home. Generally the younger the women were widowed, the more they felt they needed to develop these ties and connections; evidently women who were widowed older had had longer to develop them (Galvin, 2005).

Like marriage, being a mother seems to be fundamental to the respect given to widowed women (Thapan, 2003). Widowed women who were childless were not as respected as those who were mothers, as they were unable to fulfill both significant gendered roles: namely those of being wives and mothers (AFN: 07.05.14). Being a mother was implicit to well-being, and as discussed further in *Chapter 6*, motherhood was also fundamental to identity building and enacting agency.

Although she lived separately from her in-laws, Jogmaya (40, 39, Brahman) highlighted how their family and the wider community would treat widowed women with more respect if they were mothers:

> *"Children act as a support. If a widow is alone, even her family members (from her maiti) do not pay much attention to her. People in the community also do not behave too nicely if the widow is childless. So, she can live with support if she has children".*

Goma (40, 39, Newar) further illustrated this:

> *"You know that in Nepali society it is important to have a child. People tend to pass negative comments to those who do not have kids so it's important to have kids."*

Goma lived in Indrachowk with her in-laws and her two children where she was responsible for the housework and cooking. However, it was not only the presence of a family or children that was significant to widowed women, but also the strength of the relationships within the family, and the subsequent image that the family portrayed within the community. Jha and White (2016: 147) stress that relationships within

the family are important "in itself and because being able to manage these relationships successfully enhances reputation in the community", and subsequently brings with it status and respect. Illustrating the way in which dynamics within the home shape the treatment and respect given to women in the wider community Subhadra (50, 25, Chhetri) expressed:

> *"If a person gets love and respect in their house and family, then they will be respected in the society as well and if they are not respected in the house and family, they won't be respected elsewhere."*

Subhadra lived with her two sons and daughters-in-law in Phutung. Although Subhadra had an unhappy marriage – her husband was around 40 years older than her – she highlighted the critical importance of the relationship she had with her patrilocal family in influencing her well-being. Subhadra's quote suggests that the family and the community are not separate entities, but interconnected spheres that mutually reinforce each other; this symbiotic relationship between the family and community emerged throughout the research.

With reference to children, it is also important to explore the ways in which having a daughter or a son shaped women's well-being. Traditionally in Nepal, sons have been favoured over daughters; the cultural preference for sons is largely a consequence of the tradition where upon marriage daughters move into their husband's home, leaving their parents' home (Brunson, 2010). Due to this, it is the sons who are expected to look after their parents in their old age, hence parents may have a preference for giving birth to a son (see *Chapter 4*). Although with increasing gender equality such preferences are decreasing, or are at least less vocalised, many participants detailed the importance of having a son.

Lokendra (61, 21, Brahman) spoke of how her life was difficult because she did not have a son to support her:

> *"I don't have a son, I don't have a husband, I don't have brothers, I am alone. There is no one there to support me. I had to leave my village to stay with my daughter here. I would have enjoyed staying in my village. If I had support from a son, I would not have had to leave the village."*

Although Lokendra was living with her daughter who was supporting her, she stressed how she felt 'alone' as she did not have a son, or a male family member more generally (see Thapan, 2003). These more traditional attitudes associated with the roles of sons and daughters can perhaps be attributed to her older age and 'higher' caste status.

While many women did not discriminate in terms of the gender of their children, participants in a focus group in Kirtipur explained how they felt that the community would generally respect them more if they had a son. Mina (36, 30, Newar) who had a 14-year-old son also illustrated:

> *"It is not that you personally will differentiate between your children, but the way people look at you is different. If you have a daughter people will look at you most of the time and think you are a lonely person because your daughter will get married one day and leave you, but your son will be there with you".*

In this way the presence of a son made participants feel more secure about their old age and ensured that they were not pitied, but were more respected within the community. Generally, participants felt that women who had sons had a higher social status within the family and community, and thus were able to use this familial and social capital to their benefit. Thus, in this case, the very presence of a son, whether or not he was actually supportive, helped to ensure widows were respected in the wider community.

While sons were generally preferred, some participants spoke about the benefits of having daughters. A focus group participant illustrated

the relationship she had with her daughter and how she overcame discrimination associated with not having a son:

> *"My only concern now is to raise my daughter. Now she is older she is like my friend. Now, I'm really happy. They used to also discriminate against me because I had a daughter. I thought I am going to treat my daughter how I would treat a son, and that was my stance. Now even my daughter can stand up for me. I could jinx this, but now they (people in the community) respect me. You have to keep your heart clean…you shouldn't care what others say." (Participant 4, FGD 4).*

This participant explained how through her confidence and perseverance in treating her daughter in the same way she would a son, she had gained respect in the community. Others stressed how they had a mutual understanding with their daughters and were able to share things with them. Binita (60, 43, Chhetri) had two sons and two daughters, and although she was grateful to her sons for their support, she felt that she had been able to share her feelings and grief with her daughters (AFN: 13:03:14). In the context of housework, daughters were more likely to help their mothers. Shasi (48, 47, Brahman) had two sons (23 and 24 years old) and explained why it would have been helpful to have a daughter; "*if I had a daughter she would do the puja every day and the sons wouldn't. Also a daughter looks after the kitchen, but my sons wouldn't agree to do that.*" In addition, since fathers are traditionally the disciplinarians, some widowed women found they were disrespected by their sons and unable to control them, whereas daughters were seen to be more obedient.

Within the context of family, participants frequently mentioned that a 'good life' was to have companionship, support and love from their husband. Participants tended to talk about their husband as a friend, as a support and a partner. Dhana Maya (50, 44, Newar) described her relationship with her husband:

> *"See what happens is your husband is your friend. You meet, you marry, you become friends and take life together as it comes"*

Anu (50, 40, Chhetri) who had a love marriage further reiterated how she felt that she and her husband were more like friends:

> *"We were like friends and not husband and wives and when he passed away it was like a friend passing away. And whenever I remember him now I don't feel I have lost my husband but a very close friend."*

Given this, participants rarely talked about their husband in the context of sexual or emotional intimacy or talked about their intimate well-being more broadly (see also *Chapter 4*). However, interestingly Dhan Jumari (76, 50, Brahman), an older woman, was one of the only participants to mention sex. She explains:

> *"What did you lose being single? Your husband. According to our society, we lost sex and nothing else. What he gave to me, his love, his care is with me even if he is alive or not. It does not exist in a direct way, but it does exist indirectly".*

Although remarriage is now legal, only two women in this research had remarried. In Nepali culture discussions about remarriage and future relationships are, by and large, not encouraged, and conversations about loss of intimacy and sex are even more difficult. As a researcher I was interested in this important aspect of perceptual well-being and I did ask some participants about relationships and remarriage, and where appropriate I did ask subtle questions about the loss of intimate well-being. However, unsurprisingly participants were not hugely forthcoming with such information and there was lot that was alluded to, but left largely unsaid. I was cautious of the fact that I did not want to offend participants or lose their trust by probing too much at the issue. As time passes and remarriage is more widely encouraged, I anticipate that it will also become easier to talk to younger widowed women about relationships and intimacy.

However, it should be said that participants did say how they missed having someone to 'walk with', a phrase translated from Nepali which was often used to imply an intimate relationship (see *Chapter 4*). What was also interesting was that two widowed women, who were not participants of this PhD research but of my Masters research, visited me in London during a conference they were attending. During our time together these women often talked and laughed about men, they frequently asked me to 'find them a boyfriend'. In this way it seems, out of Nepal, in a space they felt free from judgement, they were comfortable in articulating their desire for relationships and intimacy. Even though most interviews in Nepal were conducted with only my interpreter and I, perhaps situated in a cultural context that did not support discussions of intimacy or the pursuit of further relationships, participants felt they could not discuss such issues.

Friendship

Friendship brought women self-confidence, material support and comfort. Monmaya (51, 33, Chhetri) from Kirtipur explained, *"friends are always there to help you and if we come together we can do so many things"*. Monmaya was a member of the WHR group in Kirtipur, and thus she had perhaps been able to observe the benefits from her friendships and the impact they could make as a group. Similarly, participants in *FGD 4* expressed how friends were most important within their current conceptions of well-being (see *Table 5.2*). They spoke of how they did not feel they needed friends when their husbands were alive, and previously felt that money and family was more important to them:

> *"Participant 2: To work we need a friend.*
> *Participant 4: We need friends for everything, to go anywhere or to work. We need friends for emergencies. Nothing is possible without a friend.*

Participant 1: We need friends. Where could we go alone?
Interpreter: So why is communication the second most important?
Participant 2: To talk to friends. If we get tired, we can rest and chat. If we sit alone, we will always be alone". (FGD 4)

These women were all part of a WHR group, many of whom attended adult education classes run by their group leader Narbada (28, 24, Newar). Given that most of these women only had basic literacy, they would perhaps have felt nervous about going places alone. However, somewhat paradoxically, having a friend to accompany them could have given them a sense of freedom and independence. This reiterates the way in which independence was highly relational.

It is perhaps the case that these women saw the critical importance of friendship, as they had been able to realise the benefits of the group, and the friendships within it. This reiterates the importance not only of exploring the intersectional identities, but also of critically analysing how participants' involvement in organisations shaped their conceptualisations of well-being. Furthermore, through their group cohesion they had been able to empower each other and resist some of the practice associated with widowhood. Such notions of collective and relational agency lead appropriately to the next chapter concerned with agency.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has detailed embedded conceptions of well-being. It first provided an overview of the diverse ways in which widowed women conceptualised well-being. Then, by exploring the myriad ways in which aspects of well-being were perceived as being important, the interconnections between the three spheres of material, perceptual and relational well-being were identified. Importantly, aspects of material well-being like education and health underpinned aspects of perceptual

well-being like self-confidence and independence and vice versa. Whilst conceptions of well-being were articulated through individual participants, the importance of community and relatedness in shaping these embedded perceptions was particularly prevalent.

In the context of material well-being, basic needs and income were articulated as core universal things needed to live well. But participants also spoke of how income and basic needs were important for being independent and 'not having to ask anyone for support', and thus being able to maintain respect and status in the community. Other participants stressed the importance of more perceptual aspects of well-being like confidence, independence and faith; although money and income were evidently still important to them. These perceptual aspects were also often understood in a highly relational way. For example, confidence was sought through children, and independence was considered with reference to the wider community and societal codes of conduct. Centrality of children, family, and friendships to relational well-being was then explored. Further to this, the ways in which social identities, life-courses and wider temporality shaped broader conceptions of well-being were also illustrated.

Embedded conceptualisations of well-being did somewhat shift upon widowhood, for example some participants explained that their family had become more intrinsic to their well-being. Others detailed that they previously did not think about what well-being meant to them, but since the demise of their husbands they thought about it much more. Their increased responsibility, and new social and familial role associated with their widowed status, perhaps forced women to think about their well-being more directly. However, it should be noted that many participants detailed that their conceptions of well-being did not change upon widowhood. Significantly, women stressed that their children had always been the most important aspect, further highlighting that regardless of their marital status, women's well-being

was highly connected with children. So whilst some conceptions of well-being did somewhat change upon widowhood, many did not, this reiterates the need to focus on the whole life-course, and not to essentialise the temporal period of widowhood.

At this point it is important to explore how these conceptions of well-being reflect the understandings of what is needed to live well in other regions globally. As detailed above, conceptions of well-being whether they be material, perceptual or relational were often understood in a relational way. Given the importance of family and relationships to South Asian cultures, and particularly to women's well-being, the emphasis participants put upon relationships is unsurprising. This supports Ryan and Deci's (2001) research that states that relatedness is one of the three most critical aspects of well-being. Further to this, this research discovered that women's well-being was often centred around their children's well-being, This is indicative of the broader notion that women are more selfless than men, especially those in patriarchal cultures. The other two elements of Ryan and Deci's (2001) theory on well-being are autonomy and competency, and it seems that these are closely correlated to material, perceptual and relational well-being discussed within this research. Aspects of material well-being are implicit in fostering competency. Autonomy is, to a certain extent, related to perceptual well-being. For example, within this research confidence and independence emerged as two important aspects of perceptual well-being, and which are also critical in fulfilling autonomy.

Importantly, this chapter has illustrated that although women stressed the significance of money and basic needs, some participants took the need for these for granted and instead reiterated the importance of other aspects of well-being. Significantly, whilst widowhood can reduce women's income and economic security, only a few women noted that money had become more intrinsic to their well-being upon the demise of their husbands. This deconstructs the assumption that female-

headed households will be concerned primarily about income because of their supposed 'economic deprivation', and further reinforces the fact that there are multiple facets to well-being beyond monetary conceptions. Furthermore, the importance of money and basic subsistence was not comparable to that emphasised within much of the previous scholarship on widowhood, nor within orthodox conceptualisations of poverty more broadly. Additionally, as stressed in *Chapter 4*, in opposition much of the existing scholarship on widowhood, this research illustrates that women are not always negatively affected by widowhood. Notably, when compared with an approach that assumes widows live in poverty, a well-being approach has a more explicit concern with agency (see *Chapter 2*; consequently this chapter leads fittingly on to the next chapter, which is concerned with agency.

CHAPTER 6

AGENTIAL PRACTICES AMONG NEPALI WIDOWS

> *"I feel that girls are stronger than boys. We women can live our whole life even without our husband, but if a wife dies, then the husband will have to remarry. We have the capacity of sacrifice, selflessness, we have the power to tolerate and we can love unconditionally. We can take any hardships with a smile in our face." Narbada (28, 24, Newar)*

Narbada and her husband Bharat were childhood sweethearts. He proposed to her when they were 12 years old, and they later married at the age of 22. After a year of marriage, and 11 years of friendship, Bharat was killed by a drunk driver. When Bharat died, Narbada was in her final year of University study pursuing a degree in management. As a consequence of her grief she was unable complete her degree. A few months after his death, an older widowed woman brought Narbada a booklet she had come across for Narbada to read to her. After reading the support booklet that had been produced by WHR, and had information about the rights of 'single women' (see *Chapter 1*), Narbada was keen to get involved with the organisation. Since she was one of the few educated widowed women living in her area, she became the local coordinator for WHR[71] and also started teaching widowed women basic literacy. Two years prior to our meeting, she returned to University to study sociology so she could learn more about social issues, and become even more active in her community. Through her social work Narbada has made a significant contribution to her local area and was a highly respected individual (see *Figure 6.1*).

Although much of the existing scholarship overlooks the agential capacity of widowed women and depicts them as uniformly discriminated against, vulnerable and passive (see *Chapter 2*), Narbada thinks differently. The extract this interview with her above is significant in that it highlights the power of women and their central

[71] As explained previously WHR is the only Nepali organisation solely working for gender equality on the basis of marital status.

role within a cultural context where they are traditionally considered to be subservient to men (Jha and White, 2016). It begins to posit important questions about the complexity of gendered agency.

Figure 6.1: Narbada photographed for a magazine article

(Source: Solley, 2014)

Given that agency should be understood in the form of a continuum, this chapter does not discuss resisting and conforming as separate entities, but illustrates the complicated nature of agency, and the simultaneity of resisting and conforming, by examining agential iterations themselves. These acts of agency will be discussed primarily within the context of restrictions associated with widowhood based on adornment, social interaction and relationships. However, this chapter also investigates agential iterations connected to gendered cultural practices more broadly, as a widowed woman's identities related to her marital status and gender could not be disentangled. Furthermore, these discussions will not only explore how agency is asserted, but why it is asserted. Two women may arrive at the same action; therefore the impetus behind the action is of as much value to feminists, as the particulars and details of the action itself (Mahmood, 2005). This chapter will also illustrate the hierarchical nature of agential actions – in that agency varied according to the specific norms being transgressed. For example, women were much more likely to wear shades of red than to wear *sindur, pote* (see Chapter 1) or remarry. The way in which intersectional identities, temporality, the socio-cultural context and beliefs in fate and karma shaped agential iterations will also transcend this analysis.

ADORNMENT

Adornment is perhaps the most immediate, visual and expressive means of articulating agential action. Gendered identities, and subsequently gendered agency, are predominantly developed around the body (Bordo, 1990; Butler, 1990). Thus unsurprisingly, women's agential (in)action has often been framed around adornment with much scholarly research focusing upon veiling practices in particular (see Abu-Lughod, 2013; Bilge, 2010; MacDonald, 2006; Mahmood, 2001; 2005). Since many of the practices and restrictions associated with

widowhood relate to clothing and accessorising, it is appropriate to open this discussion by exploring agency in the context of adornment, and the colour red particularly.

Red is highly significant to marital status, and to Nepali culture more generally; participants explained how red signified 'life', 'passion', 'love', 'fertility', 'reproduction', 'health', 'wealth' and above all 'marriage'. Upon the death of their husband, and in response to specific cultural expectations, this colour has historically been stripped away from widowed women. To place this in context, since the outlawing of *sati* in 1924, widowed women had to ceremonially take off their red saris, bangles, *tika, sindur and pote* and replace them with white cloth, refraining from wearing accessories and make up (see Yadav, 2016). Traditionally when a woman became widowed, members of her patrilocal family would take her to a nearby river where her glass bangles were broken, her nose piercing taken out and her *pote*, *sindur* and *tika* removed (AFN: 03.09.13). These accessories, as symbols of her marriage, floated away in the water. Women were expected to refrain from wearing colourful clothing and accessorising, and adhere to other restrictions, for the remainder of their lives.

Over the decades, the restrictions associated with adornment have somewhat weakened. This is evident in terms of the specifics of the norm itself and in relation to the length of time women are meant to adhere to them. Where once widowed women used to wear white for the remainder of their lives, women in this research were only expected to do so for a specified mourning period that ranged from between 10 to 13 days, 45 days, 90 days to a year. The specific length of the mourning period was determined by a number of factors including the traditions followed by specific families, advice from religious priests, her employment status and her caste (AFN: 21.03.14).

Importantly, while the period of mourning is technically meant to end after the performance of these death rituals, in reality such on-going restrictions mean that many women are expected to continue to mourn for the rest of their lives (see Lamb, 2000). For example, once the official mourning period is completed, widowed women are expected to replace their white attire with colours which are culturally understood as being 'cool' and opposite to red - namely green, blue or yellow. This emphasis on 'cool' colours is related to a broader imperative to 'cool' and age widowed women's bodies to ensure that they look unattractive and are sexually disinteresting, and are themselves disinterested, so they can remain devoted to their deceased husbands (see *Chapters 1, 2* and *4*). Many women in this study were gifted cool coloured clothes by a member of their maternal family, usually their brothers, and were expected to avoid wearing red for the rest of their lives (AFN: 13.04.14).

Widowed women are also restricted from wearing accessories particularly red bangles, *tika*, *pote* and *sindur*. *Pote* and *sindur* are of particular significance and mark important stages in Hindu marriage ceremonies when a woman's husband gives them to her. Red saris, bangles and *tika*, although associated with marriage and married women, are not explicitly given by a woman's husband, thus there was more scope for widowed women to resist these norms (see below). This illustrates what I term a 'hierarchy of restrictions' whereby some practices are easier to transgress than others, with widows more likely to resist those that they were less likely to be punished for.

Whilst traditions and expectations associated with widowhood are tenacious, this research discovered that widowed women were, to varying degrees, choosing to, or were encouraged to, transgress these. Arguably, widowed women exercised considerable agency through adornment, accessories and make-up. Indeed many of the widows I interviewed had even started to wear red in response to discriminations based on marital status. Much of this change has

stemmed from a gender empowerment initiative facilitated WHR. In 2005 WHR initiated an empowerment programme called *'rato rang abhiyan'*[72], this is where WHR staff and volunteers visit communities and help 'single women' (see *Chapter 1*) there to form groups. At the end of this first meeting, WHR members put red *sindur* on the foreheads of women who wish to participate. This is interpreted as an embodied and symbolical resistance to discrimination based on marital status (see *Figure 6.2*).

[72] '*Rato rang abhiyan'* can be translated into English as 'red colour movement'.

Figure 6.2: Widowed women at 'rato rang abhiyan' in Kaski

(Source: researchers' own photograph, Kaski, December 2013)

I attended a '*rato rang abhiyan'* in the district of Kaski and spoke to some of the women who attended the ceremony[73] (Yadav, 2016). Shanti (50, 43, Chhetri) pictured on the right above told me*, "I feel happy to wear red sindur today, together we will be able to do so much".* This quote highlights the collective agency within these empowerment initiatives (Yadav, 2016). Evidently the event and the assembly of the group highlights the collective nature of agency. Whilst this type of initiative can, and evidently did, empower widowed women, it is also problematic in that it could further exclude and marginalise those who are not willing to transgress norms.

As shown from the 'cool' colours she was wearing, it was unlikely that Shanti had resisted the restriction associated with adornment prior to this. Indeed for many of these women this was the first time they had worn red since the death of their husbands. WHR members encouraged women participating in the ceremony to continue to wear red beyond this engagement. The strength of this movement is also reflected by the fact that in areas where WHR are not yet operational, groups of widows have undertaken their own ceremonies.

As it is the colour of marriage, red was a primary way in which widowed women resisted discrimination based on their widowed status. From this photograph (see *Figure 6.3*) one might think that Jogmaya (40, 39, Brahman) was married given that she was wearing a red necklace, red *tika*, red bangles, red umbrella trousers and red *sindur*.

[73] I had become friends with the WHR staff in the Kaski during my undergraduate and master's research. Although this was not in my doctoral research area I wanted to return there to visit them.

Figure 6.3: Jogmaya pictured at her sisters' home in Bhaktapur

(Source: researchers' own photograph, Bhaktapur, November 2013)

Indeed, we sat chatting with her for 30 minutes waiting for our 'widowed' participant to arrive until we were informed that Jogmaya was in fact the very participant we were waiting for. Due to her appearance as a married woman, and further miscommunication issues with gatekeepers, it did not occur to us that she was our interviewee. Jogmaya subsequently explained why it was important for her to wear red:

> *"People don't wear much red because they are scared of society, I am against such practice. We should bring reform. I have understood that everybody wants to wear red but due to the fear from society, they don't wear red clothes. Now when I wear, someone could be encouraged and then more people will be encouraged and so on. I had always thought that if I ever lose husband I would not give up red things."*

As discussed previously, widowed women are commonly restricted, or restrict themselves, from wearing red up until the first anniversary of their husbands' deaths when, in some cases, these restrictions were partially lifted. Within this context, wearing red or colours similar to red before the first anniversary of death was somewhat radical. Furthermore, given that Jogmaya was a Brahman her adornment with red is even more progressive, illustrating how agential iterations can be better understood when correlated with intersectional identities and embedded within socio-cultural contexts.

In turn, like Jogmaya, other participants also wore red partly to encourage other widowed women to do the same. In this vein, Narbada (28, 24, Newar) explained:

> *"I do put on red clothes now. And after the three year ritual ends I will start putting on my (red) bangles and pote too. I want to do that because I have been working for women and I want to see positive changes in the lives of single women. And the other reason is if I start putting on red clothes, bangles, pote, tika etc the other single women will start doing it too. I want to do this for all the*

single women here, it requires a lot of courage to do this, but I hope I will be able to do it."

Although these actions may appear like individual and subtle enactments, they are evidently part of a wider motivation and growing movement to encourage and empower other widows. Narbada and Jogmaya clearly hoped that their adornment with red would echo through their communities, reiterating the significance of collective and relational agency (Willemse, 2007; Yadav, 2016). This finding is also reiterated in the work of Ramnarain (2014:13), who states that the "consolidation of women's small, everyday triumphs into larger empowerment gains" can "pave the path for a nuanced articulation of gender equality". This restates the need to consider more 'everyday' and subtle agential iterations and the relational and collective nature of agency. Furthermore, Narbada hoped that opposing norms - in the vein of achieving greater gender equality – would generate positive karma for her in the future, highlighting how eschatological beliefs in fate and karma played a part in shaping agency.

While these examples illustrate how women transgressed norms associated with widowhood, one needs to be careful about interpreting this as 'resistance'. For example, adorning with red could have initially seemed like an act of outright resistance, yet looking more closely it could have also been perceived as a form of conforming. The premise behind the desire to wear red was that all women, regardless of their marital status should be equal. Nonetheless the adornment of red perpetuated the centrality of marriage to a woman's life and the notion that her identity should be tied to her husband. As Yadav (2016: 3) states, "a woman's relationship with her husband exerts the primary influence over what color she wears". To this end, by wearing red, women rejected the identity of 'widowed', but reinforced gendered norms associated with women 'belonging' to men. Taking a provocative perspective, the adornment with red could have said *'we resist*

discrimination on the basis of marital status', but it could equally and simultaneously have said '*women are all equal, yet still inferior to men'*.

Thus acts of resistance were performed in the context of predominant gendered norms - in this case traditions associated with marriage – thus reinstating the fact that resisting and conforming can occur simultaneously and the need for an agential continuum (Butler, 1990). This also echoes the point that a person's multiple identities cannot be disentangled; in this instance a widowed woman could not separate her marital status from her gender, as they are not mutually exclusive. Identities are not piled on top of each other as it were, but interconnected in complex ways.

In other cases, it appeared that women were opposing practices associated with widowhood, yet due to some form of wider support, these acts of 'resistance' were not as oppositional as initially anticipated. For example, they were often performed with the endorsement and encouragement of God, their late husbands, a family member or a member of the community. While the embodiment of red implied resistance, the need for approval or justification within certain channels, suggested a certain degree of conformity to traditional and patriarchal lines of 'authority'.

As detailed, upon the death of her husband, a family member - usually her maternal brother – gifted a widowed woman new clothes. While these clothes were generally of 'cooler' colours, in some cases women were gifted red clothes, which signified that members of their *maiti* symbolically approved them to transgress restrictions associated with widowhood. Sabita (50, 25, Chhetri) explained:

> *"I liked wearing red and I never felt bad about wearing it. Because of this, I don't keep thinking of myself as a widow. In Nepali culture, women are gifted clothes from her maiti on the 13th day*

after their husbands' death. My parents and brothers gave me red clothes then. I have been wearing red since childhood and because my parents wanted me to wear red I did."

While wearing red may initially be interpreted as an act of resistance, the approval to do so was granted when Sabita's family, mainly her parents and her brothers, gifted her red clothing. As such, her decision to wear red was one that was first sanctioned by others. Given the centrality of the family in Nepal, seeking its approval, and thereby maintaining its honour, was highly important to women (see *Chapter 5* on relational well-being). Sabita also used her identity as a Nepali, and traditions within Nepali culture, to justify wearing red by referring to the fact that she had worn red clothing from a young age[74]. Through wearing red it also seemed that Sabita was able to transgress feelings of widowhood. It should also be noted that since Sabita was previously unaware that her family would gift her red clothes, her act of agency was somewhat involuntary - although she may have decided to wear red subsequently anyway. Her decision to wear the red clothes she was given was likely to be voluntary, but the initial idea was not her own planning. In this way is difficult to exactly determine the boundary between voluntary and involuntary agency, as an act can be both simultaneously. It was possible to uncover such acts of involuntary agency by asking in detail how exactly participants came about resisting and conforming to norms.

Exploring Sabita's intersectional identities helped to further contextualise her agential enactment. Her family's somewhat relaxed attitude towards restrictions and expectations associated with widowhood might be explained by their – and her - caste status. As a Chhetri she was likely to be under less pressure, compared to 'high' caste Brahmans, to adhere to traditional practices associated with widowhood. This example effectively illustrates how agency involved

[74] When children are approximately six months old they take part in a rice feeding ceremony when they are gifted red clothes made of velvet (AFN: 04.10.13).

both resisting and conforming, and how women worked within existing norms and cultural practices in order to enact agency.

In other instances a woman's husband had endorsed her adornment of red before he passed away. Sharda (45, 24, Newar) lived with her son, daughter in-law and grandchildren in rented accommodation near the tourist area of Thamel, where she also had a small souvenir stall. She explained how her husband had advised her before he passed away: *"when my husband was dying, he used to say that I shouldn't quit wearing any coloured clothe. He said 'you don't need to quit any colours for me'".* Urmila (66, 62, Brahman) also stressed that her husband had given her permission to wear shades of red, but not bangles, *pote*, or *sindur:*

> *"Well previously widows couldn't wear red, but now it has been introduced that we can wear red, this custom has changed. I feel it is a good change. I wear red tika and even the god's tika. I don't wear pote, glass bangles and sindur, the rest I wear. My husband also used to say to me, don't wear all white, you can wear shades of red."*

Notably, as detailed above, *pote* and *sindur* are particularly significant as they are traditionally given to women by their husbands upon marriage; thus transgressing these norms was considerably more difficult than those concerned with the adornment of red coloured clothing and accessories more generally. In these examples, Sharda and Urmila were using their relationship with their husbands, and the authority they had over them, to justify their adornment of red. As such, while on the one hand they opposed norms associated with widowhood, on the other they upheld gendered norms connected to the centrality of marriage for women and a husband's superior authority. This relates to Ciotti's (2009) study of 'lower' caste women's political agency that explores how women were supported and encouraged in their agential pursuits by securing consent from their husbands first. In Urmila's case, along with her husband's approval she also justified wearing red by detailing how society had changed and now permitted

it. It could also be argued that widowed women may have wanted to continue wearing red because in that way they could keep a part of their husband, and thus their status as married women, alive.

Approval was also sought from friends and members of the community. Clothes and adornment were particularly important to Birmaya (43, 28, Newar) as she owned a clothes shop. Eight months after she became widowed her friend took her to the temple and gave her a red sari, *tika, sindur*, bangles and *pote.* Evidently while her friend initiated this, her patrilocal family, and particularly her father in-law, also endorsed it: *"my father in law was very supportive. He has always told me to put on whatever I want to, to enjoy and not to worry".* She felt that this incident at the temple, and the subsequent approval of her father in-law, enabled her to wear what she desired without fear of recrimination. From my previous experience researching widowhood, it became apparent that instances where women were gifted red clothes from friends, other women in the community or members of an organisation had become increasingly popular (AFN: 03.03.14).

Jaya Kali (28, 26, Brahman) lived alone with her three young children. Since she did not live in her *maiti* or her *ghar*, she sought permission to wear red from her community:

> *"For the first year I didn't wear white but wore green and yellow. I didn't wear any bangles or tika. Then after a year everyone told me to wear it (red) so I did. I did whatever I had to do for one year, now I want to wear it, I won't remove it. And also everyone (the community) has given me permission to wear it."*

It is evident that Jaya Kali was able to wear red as the community approved it. Her experience also demonstrated that by initially conforming to rituals for a certain period of time, subsequently facilitated greater freedom in relation to adornment in the future (see below).

Within this research it became evident that there was both an 'intergenerational' and 'intra-gender' transmission of approval/disapproval whereby older women gave younger women advice on their adornment. For example, Indu (38, 31, Brahman) explained how an older woman in her village gave her advice:

> *"Here there is an old lady (widow) who wears all red and she said on the first death anniversary after the puja is completed, one can put the red tika from the priest and then you will be free from all the restrictions. Then dashain came and I wore red..."*

Indu lived in Mulpani with her three children where she worked as a tailor. Neeru (43, 40, Brahman) detailed her own experience of practicing these rituals, how she advised others and how others advised her:

> *"I don't want others suffering by wearing white as I did. I would tell them not to wear white. I can't tell this to elders like my mother, but for women the same age me and younger I can tell them to wear a red tika. I haven't worn bright red but I wear this colour (points to her clothes which are maroon). My older sisters tell me not to wear too much red. I wear normal simple clothes, I am neutral."*

These extracts illustrate an intra-gender transmission of approval whereby women play a key role in advising other widowed women. This is unsurprising given that women are commonly responsible for communicating and maintaining norms and traditions within Nepali society. These experiences also highlight a one directional intergenerational channel of instruction where older women give advice to younger women, but where younger women cannot give advice to older women. Notably Neeru expressed that she could not persuade women her mother's age to not wear white, but she could advise women her own age or younger than her.

Importantly, since older women had permitted Indu and Neeru to wear a little red, this exemplifies how the boundaries of acceptance grow for each successive generation, and also suggests more empathetic gender relations across the generations. Chandra Kala (62, 46, Brahman) also spoke of her experience with regard to the restrictions:

> *"We have always been putting tika and I like putting on the tika. It makes your face look bright. Why should I stay sad and dull if a small tika will light up my face? I will not put on red saris but then other colors are fine. If the new generation puts red on that is fine, that is their wish but for me it just doesn't come from my heart."*

Evidently Chandra Kala accepted the wearing of red amongst the younger generations, but did not feel comfortable herself to do so, although she did wear red *tika*.

The greater freedom each generation of women allowed the next is significant in itself, as older and younger women are often depicted as being at odds with each other (see also below). In Neeru's case her older sisters told her not to '*wear too much red*', implying that she could wear a little, when they themselves did not wear red at all. She also spoke of how '*she didn't want others suffering as she did*' by wearing white. However Shasi (48, 47, Brahman) illustrates how older women were still trying to impose restrictions on younger generations, thus the extent to which empathetic intergenerational gender relations are widespread is debated:

> *"Older women are more restricted as they do not wear any red and even encourage us to wear white. I have been questioned about why I did not wear white. But my generation has been quite forward with this."*

Pragya (50, 44, Newar) spoke of how she wanted to wear red *tika* but was fearful of the older generations

> *"I want to (wear red tika) but I haven't done that yet. I put on a black tika but I feel scared to wear a red one. I am worried about what people might say….the thing is it's a closed community and the older generation still follow these customs. I know for a fact that from our generation onwards things will change a lot. But most of them (referring to the older generation) are uneducated and are reluctant to accept changes like this quickly"*

The transmission of norms between generations is critically important since it is these very interactions that perpetuate or transcend the restrictions and discriminatory practices widowed women experience. Furthermore, since well-being and agency are interlinked, the transfers of norms across generations will evidently shape intergenerational transfers of well-being. For example, strict Brahman women who are concerned with maintaining their piety could enforce these norms onto the following generation, subsequently impeding their independence, confidence and their agency more broadly. In her work on intergenerational well-being, Wright (2016) details how norms, customs and values transfer through the generations influencing well-being itself, and conceptions of well-being more broadly. These examples also show how social identities, in this case primarily age, generation and stage in life-course, shaped women's agential capacity.

Approval was not limited to individuals, the family, older women or members of the community. Indira (55, 37, Newar) detailed how she did not enjoy wearing red upon marriage, as her husband had been violent towards her, but that upon widowhood she received a sign from god to wear red:

> *"I had gone to Dolkha Bhimsen temple with my friends. When I was bowing down to the feet of the goddess a packet of tika, red tika, fell on to my head. My friends suggested that it was sent by god it so I could also wear red. After that, I have been wearing red."*

It appeared that through this sign from god, and subsequent encouragement from her friends, Indira justified wearing red. In this

incidence, one could argue that Indira's decision to wear red *tika* was somewhat involuntary, as it had fallen on her head in the temple. Her subsequent decision to introduce the colour red into her life was voluntary. This highlights the blurred line between involuntary and voluntary agency. She further explained that she primarily wanted to wear red for her safety, so she could *not* be identified as a widowed woman; within this research many women spoke of how adorning red made them feel safer.

This section has illustrated how through endorsements from friends, husbands, the community, older (female) family members or god justified women's desires to wear red. If and when women were publicly scrutinised for not adhering to practices, they often defended themselves by explaining how they had been authorised to do so by others. Seeking approval in these ways perpetuated gendered norms in Nepal that require women to go through their family or husband for approval, thus reinforcing the patriarchal notion that women do not have or should not have their own autonomy and/or capacity for their own decision-making. This reiterates the fact that although the adornment of red seemed like an act of resistance to norms associated with widowhood, the means of approval through which it was sought perpetuated existing gendered norms. This also restates the need to not only look at the practice itself, but to ask questions about *why, how* and *under what circumstances* it was practiced. These examples further illustrate that, like the previous discussion of independence and confidence (see *Chapter 5*), agency should also be understood in a 'relational' way (Willemse, 2007).

Importantly, some women used other norms and traditions to resist those associated with widowhood. With regard to adornment and appropriating certain traditions, it is important to explore the particular experience of Newari widows. As discussed in *Chapter 4*, Newari women are married three times: once to the sun, once to a fruit

and once to their husband. Within this research many, although not all, Newari participants were adorning with red in some way. Women explained that they wore red because while their husband had died, they were still technically married to the fruit and to the sun. Durga (74, 54, Newar) told us:

> *"Some widows do not wear red things, but in our Newari community, we are already married to a 'bel' fruit during childhood. So we can wear red things then since we are already married. When we are kept in 'Gufa' (see Chapter 4) we offer water to the Sun God so we do not have much restriction. I restrained myself for a year after buwa's (husband's) death. Now, I have been putting on this tika made of velvet (pointing to researcher)….she is finding it strange because I am putting on tika (laughs)."*

This was one of my earlier interviews and first experiences of hearing about how Newari women married three times, which explains why Durga commented on my intrigue and surprise. Subsequent interviews with Newari women - and women from other caste groups - frequently mentioned the distinct experience of Newari widows related to adornment. Putali (43, 40, Brahman), who worked in a bookshop, detailed how Newari widows have more freedom as a consequence of their prior marriage to the sun and fruit:

> *"They (Newari widows) are first married to a fruit, their husband is a mere friend. They are not bound to stay with the husband and live with them forever like in our culture. Even if the husband passes away, they are still married to the fruit. But still they are still following their culture."*

When I first heard of the *Gufa* ceremony (see *Chapter 4*), I felt that it seemed quite oppressive and symbolically reiterated the fact that girls and women should be ultimately concerned with marriage and fertility. However, when I talked to Newari woman about the ceremony many spoke of how it was fun and enjoyable as they were with their friends and they did not have to go to school. Furthermore, although in many ways the *Gufa* ceremony did not necessarily foster gender equality,

women were able to use the ceremony and the traditions surrounding it to transgress gendered practices associated with widowhood.

This therefore demonstrates the simultaneity of conforming and resisting, as women renounced the identity of 'widowed' by wearing red, but at the same time reinstated gendered norms associated with marriage and fertility by emphasising the Newari cultural practice of marrying three times and the *Gufa* ceremony. Putali's extract also perfectly encapsulates how women creatively negotiated norms, but how they did so in such a way that they were still seen to be *'following their culture'*. In addition to this, it also illustrated how women carved out spaces of action through "appropriating multiple identities" (Ramnarain, 2014: 3); in this case their caste identity.

Related to caste, it should also be noted that Brahman women, either through their own internalised pressure or pressure from their family, caste, community and wider society, were more likely to conform to gendered cultural practices (see *Chapter 4*; Ramnarain, 2014). This perhaps explained women like Nirmala's (57, 53, Brahman) desire to adhere to gendered cultural practices in relation to widowhood. Furthermore, Nirmala's slightly older physiological age also explained her observance (Yadav, 2016). The extent to which widowed women conformed to restrictions was also shaped by their religion. Like many Newari widows, Christian widows also avoided practices and restrictions associated with adornment by accentuating their religious identity. Due to her identity as a Christian, Kamana (48, 46, Newar) was able to reject the expectations of both married women and widowed women, by not adhering to either the expectation of wearing red when married or the adornment restrictions associated with widowhood (see *Chapter 4).*

Having detailed how widowed women (partially) 'resisted' practices associated with adornment, it is important to explore how these norms were negotiated and the boundaries of acceptance were pushed. Women complied with norms for a minimally accepted period or adhered to the most basic rules just enough to avoid criticism (Lamb, 2000; Yadav, 2016). Therefore in these ways the norms were reproduced, but also subtly subverted (Butler, 2009). It was a certain type of red, commonly a strong *blood red*, that is worn by married women; this photograph taken at the *Teej*[75] festival depicts this particular shade of red (see *Figure 6.4*). Widowed women in this study conformed to norms, but also simultaneously *reworked* them by adorning shades of red such as maroon, cherry, cerise and crimson, but not the *blood red* directly associated with marriage (see Katz, 2004).

[75] Un-married and married women typically celebrate *Teej*. Women participate with the hope of bringing a long life and good health to their husbands, or in the case of unmarried women, their future husbands. Women typically wear red, the colour of marriage, and spend the day fasting, dancing and praying for the long life of their husbands. During *Teej* an estimated 500,000 women visit Pashupatinath Temple to worship Lord Shiva (Panday, 2015).

Figure 6.4: Women queuing to enter Pashupatinath Temple during Teej celebrations

(Source: Researcher's own photograph, Pashupatinath Temple, September 2013)

The following conversation with Iswari (26, 22, Brahman) illustrates the subtle, yet significant, differences between shades of red:

> *"Researcher: She is wearing a pinky colour but she wouldn't wear red?*
> *Iswari: Yes, I do wear red.*
> *Researcher: Very good. Why does she want to wear red?*
> *Iswari: You are asking me why I am wearing red? You know when we buy kurta (top and trouser set) we don't exactly buy RED (emphasises). You know right? We buy other colours. So even when I'm wearing other colours, it doesn't look like I don't have a husband. I haven't bought RED RED myself, but last year on Tihar (Hindu festival of lights) my brother* gave me a RED RED umbrella kurta"

Evidently for Iswari, her clothes did not signify that she was widowed or married: some women described this as being "neutral" (AFN: 15:12:13). Binita (60, 43, Chhetri), who lived in Dilly Bazaar, also stressed how she did not wear full blood red, yet wore clothes with red patterns; *"after the 13 day rituals I started wearing colorful clothes and accessories. Not the RED RED ones but ones with flowery patterns and things."* Nanda (56, 52, Newar) further expressed, *"I have not put on whole red colours, but I do put on clothes with red prints and patterns"*. Nanda was a particularly religious woman who lived in Chappagaun; interestingly, she explained how a priest had suggested that because she had already adhered to the expectations for two years she could wear full red clothes if she wished to do so.

Related to this, other women sacrificed the most fundamental accessories related to marriage, *pote* and *sindur*, in order to wear other things they wanted. Indu (38, 31, Brahman) explained how she wore red clothes and accessories apart from *sindur* and *pote*. As mentioned *pote* and *sindur* are literally given to a women from her husband upon marriage, and are thus the most symbolically important accessories for married women. As illustrated, Urmila (66, 62, Brahman) whose husband had instructed her what to wear upon widowhood said: *"I*

wear red tika and even the god's tika. I don't wear pote, glass bangles and sindur, the rest I wear.

In this way, women resisted traditional practices that stipulated that they should not wear red at all, by avoiding a particular shade of red and accessories directly related to the marriage ceremony and married women. By conforming to the practices that they would receive the most criticism for non-observance, women were able to resist other gendered cultural practices (Lamb, 2000). Within her research on ageing in West Bengal, Lamb (2000) illustrates an example of this where a widowed woman conformed to norms by wearing a white sari, but also wore a pair of green earrings. Such examples detail how women adhered to some norms but not others, and show how they simultaneously conformed and resisted by using norms and traditions creatively to carve out spaces for agency (Butler, 2009). This echoes the need to understand the way agency works within the operation of power, rather than as something peripheral to it. Further to this, these examples also reiterate the hierarchal nature of norms and practices, in that adorning *pote*, *sindur* and blood red, was more difficult to oppose than wearing other shades of red or red patterns and other accessories.

Other ways widowed women conformed, but also simultaneously pushed the boundaries of acceptance, were by complying with norms for socially accepted periods of mourning time. This was commonly until the first anniversary death ritual had been completed. Mina (36, 30, Newar) was a member of WHR and a schoolteacher in Kirtipur. During the first year of her husband's death she did not wear white, but wore blacks and greens, and since then she has worn red.

> *"I don't follow this rule about clothes and so I don't encourage any other single woman to follow it. And because most of us don't put on red clothes and things for a year, it's okay for a women to wear what she wants after this."*

Evidently she justified her own adornment of red, and that of others, since she previously abstained for a year. Mina later explained that she did not even wear white during the 13-day 'mourning period' as, first of all, it would easily signify that she was widowed, which could have caused her to be harassed; and secondly since she was a working woman, wearing white was not expected, because it was not practical. As Yadav (2016: 10) notes "widows, especially 'young widows,' felt vulnerable because a 'woman in white sari' also meant a 'woman without a man' and was therefore regarded as weak and vulnerable". Neeru (43, 40, Brahman) spoke of how she was told to wear white for 45 days as she did not have a job; *"people had said as you won't be going anywhere, as I don't have a job, don't wear other colours just wear white*".

Similarly, Jaya Kali (28, 26, Brahman) explained how if she remained devoted for one year she would not face scrutiny from her family in-law and wider community, and would be able to enjoy greater freedom in choosing her adornment thereafter. She also recounted an incident where an older woman defended her when she was criticised for wearing red.

> *"She said 'hey you shouldn't say such things like that. She did everything for a year. If we say such things, how would she feel, she would be hurt. We should help her and not treat her badly. The society has changed, taken a leap forward. You cannot say such things in today's time'"*

These examples detail the importance of time in shaping agency. If restrictions were adhered to for a certain period of time, women were rewarded for their observance through greater respect and freedom from scrutiny in the future. Through her scholarly work on widowhood, Lamb (2000: 223) stresses that through observance for certain periods, women can "earn a great deal of respect for their self-sacrifice and perseverance". Jaya Kali's quote above also restates how restrictions tended to weaken with successive generations.

Some women conformed to gendered practices associated with adornment, and the reasons for their compliance were multiple. For some it was a 'personal choice', others did so out of respect for their husbands and others were fearful of the possible retributions from society or god. Detailing how she was not consciously avoiding red, as she was not concerned about wearing it upon marriage, Kabina (32, 29, Newar) stressed:

> *"I don't wear complete red, but I wear red prints sometimes. I did not like red anyway. I have not been avoiding red because I don't have a husband*."

Consequently the restrictions around adornment were not of much concern to those who were ambivalent about the colour. However, it is difficult to know the extent to which Kabina's decision was her own, as it later transpired from a subsequent conversation with Kabina and her friend that her parents' in-law were strict and controlling. This reiterates the fact that more informal conversations after interviews can provide interesting and important information about participants' lives. Furthermore, women who had difficult relationships with their husbands were also not concerned about wearing red upon widowhood or marriage.

There were women who expressed that they did not feel like wearing red, not because they felt pressurised, but because 'their heart would not allow them to do so'. Putali (43, 40, Brahman) told us, *"the thing is even if society has accepted it, and even if other people wear it, my heart doesn't agree"*. Binita (60, 43, Chhetri) further explained:

> *"Binita: Regarding red clothes I don't put them on because my heart doesn't allow me to do so.*
> *Researcher: Do you feel it may look like your disrespecting your husband if you put on red clothes?*
> *Binita: No it's from my heart. I don't feel like wearing it."*

Undoubtedly some women felt that it would have not been right to wear red. Nonetheless, it was difficult to ascertain the extent to which this was a personal choice; there may have been a certain degree of internalisation, as women may accept and normalise gendered practices that are in fact discriminatory.

It became apparent that some women wanted to stick to traditions associated to widowhood out of respect for their deceased husbands. Prapti (50, 43, Newar) who worked in fields near her home in Satdobato explained:

> *"I didn't feel like putting on red at all. My desire for red just went away with him. If he was there with me red would be so special. It would represent our love and our marriage and that would make my face shine with joy and pride. He took all my desires for red clothes and accessories with him…it is not because of the fear of the society. My husband has passed away and this is a symbol of respect for him not because the people will say this or that."*

Evidently Prapti associated red with her husband and the love she had for him, and since he was dead she wanted to respect this. Similarly, Nanda (56, 52, Newar) a friend of Prapti's also told of how she did not put any red clothes on for two years as a *"symbol of respect"* for her husband. Conforming to such restrictions in order to 'maintain respect for their husbands' perhaps perpetuated the notion that women should be subservient to them, but was equally a way in which they could represent and symbolise their loss and grief. On this note, it should also be stressed that some women liked the restrictions, as it was a structure by which they could grieve, and enacting the rituals distracted them from their loss more generally (AFN: 04.12.13).

Through my research I came to understand that some women believed that if they did not observe the rituals and restrictions associated with widowhood their husbands' soul would not rest peacefully and perhaps

come back to 'haunt' them and their family (AFN: 30.11.13). Explaining this superstition and why she wanted to stick to all the death rituals, including those connected to adornment, Shova (50, 48, Brahman) explained:

> *"There is a certain kind of superstition that if the dead man's soul is not at peace then he will roam around (implying he will haunt the widow and the family). We also have the belief that if we do the ritual at least he will rest in peace."*

Given her 'high' caste status and her slightly older physiological age, Shova may have had more traditional and superstitious attitudes regarding the afterlife. Detailing why she wore white clothes for a year Seti (40, 17, Newar) stated:

> *"If we don't practice or do all these traditions, then I feel that, you yourself will also not get peace in your heart, and likewise the one who is dead will also not be at peace".*

These women observed these restrictions out of respect for their husbands, to let their souls free and to ensure they would not come back to haunt them. In this way it was evident that eschatological beliefs in the after-life influenced women's agential practices.

In some cases women wanted to observe restrictions 'for society'; this was either because they were fearful of society, they wanted to show their respect to society, they felt they needed to observe traditions in order to live in society or they themselves wanted to maintain societal traditions. Although many women were very aware that the practices associated with adornment were discriminatory, some felt forced to conform to practices, as they were scared about the consequences of their non-observance. Despite her role as a district officer for WHR, Sunita (34, 24, Newar) did not want to wear colourful accessories, *tika*, *sindur* or red clothes, and instead predominantly wore colours like blue,

green and purple and plain jewellery as she was fearful of what people her community might have said (see *Figure 6.5)*:

> *"I feel now I have certain barrier. For example if I go to a party I think 'what will society say about my clothes'. Even though they may not say anything, that sense of fear is always in my mind."*

Figure 6.5: Sunita pictured with her daughter in Thimi, Bhaktapur

(Source: researcher's own photograph, Thimi, May 2014)

Consequently, Sunita avoided red and overly accessorising, as members of the community could have reported back to her family in-law about her adornment. Notably she had left her *ghar* as her in-laws bullied her. She also spoke about how she initially felt anxious to go to the WHR office, as she had to walk past her in-laws home. As she was the local representative of WHR, part of her wanted to wear red, but due to the fear of retribution from her in-laws, she choose not to do so. Therefore, in this way Sunita's decision not to wear red was perhaps somewhat involuntary.

Due to the specific fear of what older women would say, Sushma (38, 33, Newar) said she felt she could not wear red or sparkly clothing:

> *"Well the culture and traditions are done as per what older woman tell us, it is women themselves who are trying to pull other women down. So whatever they say, we follow it, due to fear of what they may say… to stay in society we woman have to follow it".*

This account of restrictions imposed by older women conflicts with previous examples that suggested more empathetic gender relations across the generations. The latter part of Sushma's extract also exemplifies how in order to be included by society, women had to accept the practices present within it. Although she rejected many of the discriminations associated with widowhood, Dhan Jumari (76, 50, Brahman) further explained that women adhered to practices and traditions, whether or not they are perceived as discriminatory, as they *"help to unite us socially"*. Nirmala (57, 53, Brahman) reiterated:

> *"There are many norms that people feel that they don't want to do but they do it for the sake of showing the society….you have to give priority to the society. We have to live here and the society looks after us."*

Exploring Nirmala's life-course helped to reveal more about why she perhaps wanted to please society by conforming to traditional

expectations concerned with adornment. Nirmala moved from Hetauda – a town over hundred kilometers away - to Mulpani when she was married. As she did not have any of her own family nearby for support, she may have wanted to observe such restrictions in order to gain the local communities' approval, and support when she needed it.

It seemed Sajita (66, 20, Newar) also enacted the rituals to gain the communities support. She feared that if she did not comply then the *Guthi*[76] would not carry out the death rituals for her when she died; *"when you die, you need the Guthi, if you don't follow the widow rituals, then they won't do your final rites puja".* Since she was childless Sajita would need the *Guthi* to carry out the ritual for her[77]. If the death rituals and final rites are not completed then it is said that a person's soul will not be free (see above). In this way Sajita was concerned about her afterlife, further emphasising how eschatological beliefs and temporality shape people's motivations and agential actions. It should also be noted that as Sajita was widowed 46 years prior to taking part in this study, that since then the mourning rituals and restrictions for widowed women have somewhat eased.

Many participants believed that since these practices are part of their culture, and that most people adhered to them, then they must bring something positive to their lives. Shova (50, 48, Brahman) stressed, *"since everyone is doing it, it must be something good. Well we don't get anything out of it, but it is done by everyone"*. Related to this, women also explained that if they did not adhere to the restrictions associated with adornment and widowhood, they were worried about losing other cultural traditions in Nepali society more broadly. This illustrates how women adhered to gendered cultural practices for the purpose of conserving the practice itself, and their wider piety (Mahmood, 2005).

[76] *Guthis* are Hindu religious groups run, traditionally, by men. *Guthis* often organise festivals and perform Hindu rituals within the community.
[77] When a person dies it is usually their eldest son who conducts the funeral rituals.

Given the importance of religion in Nepal, some women were concerned that by not observing rituals they could be punished by god, their ancestors or through their own fate and karma. Due to the fear of her ancestors, and a desire to continue traditions, Tulasha (46, 39, Brahman) explained why she conformed to cultural practices:

> *"We have to continue these so that we can make a peace with our dead ancestors and follow in their footsteps. It is also because of the fear that maybe our dead ancestors will curse us, if we don't follow the tradition. It is first because of the fear and second to continue our traditions."*

Sunita (34, 24, Newar) further told of how she did not like to wear red due to her fear of society and her family god[78]; "*it is said that if we don't do it, then the family god can curse you and bad things will happen".* These examples detail how beliefs associated with karma, and wider spirituality shaped agency.

In the experiences detailed above women were observing restrictions to protect themselves from the family god, to avoid scrutiny by society, to maintain societal traditions and/or to gain societies approval in some way, which in turn might mean they can be supported in the future. Given that widowed women lost the support of their husband, society, and the potential support it could give, perhaps became more significant to their lives. These examples echo the importance of the wider society and relationships in shaping well-being, and consequently agency (see *Chapter 5*).

[78] It is common for many families in Nepal to have a specific family god that they all worship.

NEGOTIATING SPACES OF WIDOWHOOD

Referring back to the period after the abolition of *sati*, widowed women were largely confined to the home and restricted in their socio-cultural and religious engagement. The purpose of these restrictions was largely two-fold. First, since widowed women were seen to be impure, they were spatially restricted so as prevent them from bringing bad luck to community members and to auspicious occasions and spaces. Second, their movement and cultural engagement was limited so they did not have the opportunity to form new (sexual) relationships. As a result, widows were banned from visiting temples, engaging in religious practice and attending auspicious ceremonies and festivals. They were also restricted from visiting people's homes, from walking - without obvious purpose - around their area and from socialising in teashops and under the shade of the *pipal* tree (AFN: 06.11.13) [79]. Furthermore, traditionally widowed women were not permitted to return to live with their *maiti*, and particularly in the first year after the death of their husbands' they were prohibited from visiting or seeing members of their *maiti* (see *Chapter 1*). Consequently, many widowed women were more or less confined to their home and garden, and these restrictions can be best described as 'spatial'. However, over time many of these practices have eased, and widowed women in this research reported that they were somewhat freer to engage in festivals, practice their faith, socialise and visit their maternal family.

These spatial restrictions effectively meant that widowed women were traditionally prohibited from working outside their home, especially in the first year following the death of their husbands. When Dhan Jumari (76, 50, Brahman) was widowed 26 years prior to our interview, this practice was widely enforced. Fearful of recrimination for non-

[79] The *pipal* tree is native to the Indian subcontinent; Hindus and Buddhists consider it scared. Given its auspiciousness nature and abundance, local people often sit under its shade and socialise.

adherence, Dhan Jumari was unable to continue to work outside of her home, and therefore decided to establish her handicraft business here:

> *"So according to the rituals, except during times of necessities, widows are not allowed to come into contact with the outside world for a year. I couldn't stop my work obviously so I conducted everything from my home. I couldn't stop working could I?"*

Although Dhan Jumari conformed to the stipulated rituals, using her domestic space for work meant that she was able to negotiate around them and continue her work. While on the one hand, Dhan Jumari observed rituals associated with widowhood, on the other she resisted broader gendered norms at a time when it was stipulated that women's work should be limited to purely domestic duties. This also begins to open up questions associated with 'public' and 'private' space and how agency was enacted differently according to where it was deemed 'safe' and appropriate to do so.

Restrictions connected to spatial movement were also transgressed through dance. Jyoti (36, 35, Bhujel) explained:

> *"When my husband died I devoted most of my time to my friends. I carried out two or three parties. It is said that within the first year of your husband's death, you should not dance, but I did not follow that. I feel that he is watching always me and would want to see me happy, so I organised a dance party (laughs). I danced within nine months of my husband's death. I also have a life and I should not spend my life crying for him."*

Her own organisation of the parties, and the fact that she danced within the first year of her husband's death, made her enactment even more significant. Jyoti also spoke of how she went to the cinema in that year, which is also traditionally prohibited; this reiterates the need to acknowledge temporality when contextualising agential iterations. Furthermore it is important to note that, although Jyoti asserted her resistance through dance and organising parties, she did so within a

safe private space and amongst friends, who presumably had given their prior endorsement of this. This agential iteration highlights the importance of space in shaping agency.

Widowed women enacted agency by transgressing spatial practices in more public domains. Traditionally in Nepal, women, and especially widowed women, are not meant to conduct particularly auspicious rituals that take place in festivals, although notably women often do most of the preparing, cooking and cleaning for the festival. Newari communities often organise festivals in *Guthis*. Indra (55, 45, Newar) explained:

> *"There are only males in the group. They (men) know each other and talk to each other, but women don't know other women, as they do not get together. So, we came up with the idea of forming a women's group mainly to be acquainted with other female members of Newari families. Now, we started with the idea that we should not depend on men for carrying out festivals, but we should do it on our own."*

Indra detailed how the group predominantly consisted of widowed women. Although she was personally criticised for joining the group by her sisters in-law, she felt that her attendance at the group would encourage other women to join, contributing towards their collective agency. Widowed women forming a group in this way is particularly salient since they are historically excluded from participating in cultural events and festivals. Indeed, even where they attend such occasions, they are expected to remain in the background and are not allowed to fulfil any auspicious roles. While upholding and reinforcing the Hindu patriarchal norms that *Guthi* groups are founded upon, Indra and her friends' decision to start a women-only group, formed to empower and encourage each other, resisted the traditional male dominance of the *Guthi* system (Mahmood, 2005). This reiterates the need to understand agential iterations within, rather than peripheral to, existing power structures. Furthermore, this highlights the importance of solidarity

and group cohesion in transcending gendered norms and those associated with marital status.

Another example of the way in which widowed women resisted spatial restrictions was through their celebration of *Teej*. As illustrated previously, *Teej* is traditionally a festival for married women. Since widowed women were perceived as being 'bad luck', they have been historically prohibited from participating in this festival. However, as a consequence of WHR initiatives and wider women's empowerment, in recent years some widows have also started to celebrate *Teej* (Key informant interview: WHR). This illustrates how through their collective cohesion and presence celebrating *Teej* in a public space transcends norms associated with widowhood. Again akin to the '*rato rang abhiyan'*, public displays of resistance could be potentially intimidating and exclusionary for those who did not want to resist norms. Further to this, as this research argues, just because a woman is not overtly resisting certain norms does not mean she is submissive.

Binita (60, 43, Chhetri) spoke of how she celebrated the festival, "*I do celebrate Teej and I fast during the day. I worship Lord Shiva and enjoy the day with my community.*" We then asked what it meant to celebrate *Teej* as a widowed woman, Binita answered:

> *"Pashupatinath Temple is great and blesses everyone. Well I am just worshipping Lord Shiva for a good life, prosperity, and good health for the family and children. What is wrong in that? I do it because I like it."*

Binita's responses was in some ways defensive and it appeared that she justified her celebration of *Teej* at Pashupatinath by emphasising the premise behind the festival, which was a celebration of Lord Shiva, rather than a celebration of *and* for married women. She did so by articulating the powers of the Lord Shiva, and importantly how her participation in the event would specifically benefit her family and her.

This illustrates the creative ways in which women carved out spaces of agency by appropriating existing religious traditions. Furthermore, such examples of widowed women celebrating festivals highlights how through their spatial movements and increasing visibility in society, widowed women have slowly been able to transgress restrictions that stipulate that they should remain within their *ghar*. Yadav (2016: 15) illustrates, "because of their increasing presence in the public sphere, widows are accepted as regular members of society."

As detailed above, widowed women are typically restricted from visiting their *maiti* within the first year of their husbands' death (see *Chapter 1*). Some women adhered to the norm, whereas others resisted it. In turn, many of the factors that determined women's observance *and* non-observance were mirrored those by those discussed in the context of adornment. For example, Shasi (48, 47, Brahman) spoke of how she did not visit her *maiti* for a year because she was scared that the family god might bring bad luck to her family and her. Conversely, Kabina (32, 29, Newar) spoke of how she disliked this restriction and sought to resist it:

> *"Kabina: At the time when you have lost your husband, you want to talk to your parents but in Newari culture we are not allowed to go to our maiti. I do not like that part of Newari tradition." Researcher: "Did you not go to your maiti at that time?" Kabina: I went there, but because I had to prepare some papers from the Government office. They needed my citizenship card urgently, but my card was lost so I had to go there. But I don't like this rule. Even my cousin's wife criticised this ritual, she said 'that a widow cannot be with her family when she needs their support the most'. People were not allowed to hug me then (within 13 days her husband's death). I find that culture harsh and I do not like it." Researcher: "How did your in-laws feel about you going to your maiti?"*
> *Kabina: "They did not oppose me going there, but some of the relatives did not want me to go there. I went there for some reason so they had to let me go. Some of them had also said that I should not stay at my maiti when I go there, but stay at another relative's place. However, I refused to stay at somebody else's house and stayed over at my parents'."*

Kabina resisted the norms associated with visiting her *maiti*, yet justified doing so by stressing to them how she needed to go there to get her citizenship card. In part, at least, this traditional expectation that women should continue to live in their patrilocal home after their husband has died might explain the restrictions placed around visiting their *maiti* in the year following the death of husbands, and certainly in relation to a more permanent return to live there.

However, upon widowhood life in the marital home was so difficult for some women that, despite the potential discrimination they could have faced, a number decided to return to their *maiti*. Usha (45, 21, Newar) recounted her experience of living in the patrilocal home after her husband passed away:

> *"After my husband passed away, for like two or three months, my in-laws did not say a word to me. After that they started behaving badly towards me and scolding me. I used to cook food and to call my in-laws to eat. Sometimes they only left me a small amount and sometimes nothing[80]. So I used to eat a few jaggery (brown hardened sweet) that my maternal uncle used to make and send to me. My mother in-law's bad behaviour, my sister in-law's ignorance and complaints etc, made it really difficult for me to stay there, so I moved back to my maiti six months after my husband died".*

By returning to live with her *maiti*, Usha resisted cultural traditions that widowed women should remain living in their *ghar* upon the demise of their husbands. This stems from the tradition that upon marriage women are not only married to their husbands, but the patrilocal home more broadly (see *Chapter 1*). Usha later explained that she was able to move back to her *maiti* easily as she did not have any brothers living there. If a woman has brothers living in her *maiti* they may see her as a threat to their inheritance of the parental property, and her sisters' in-law may feel she will impose on their familial roles. Clearly property, and traditions surrounding the entitlement to property, has a critical

[80] The order in which people eat depends on their ranking within the family. This ranking is largely defined by gender and age (AFN: 14.09.13).

influence in shaping the way in which widows are treated by their patrilocal home and their *maiti*. This reiterates the fact that property is much more than a capital asset.

Usha's experience illustrates how agency was often unplanned and involuntary. She did not want to, and had not planned to, leave her patrilocal home, but after her in-laws started to mistreat her and deny her of food, she decided to leave. So whilst resisting and conforming were often mostly planned and conscious enactments by participants, they were sometimes, in the case of Usha here, involuntary. As mentioned previously, it is difficult to exactly determine the boundary between voluntary and involuntary agency, as an act can be both simultaneously.

While some widowed women had little choice but to return to their *maiti*, others chose to continue to live with their in-laws in the marital home – often suffering significant abuse. It was clear that the abuse directed at widowed women was often designed to try and make them leave. However, if women left the patrilocal home, they could symbolically surrender their share of the property. Thus remaining in the marital home despite such difficulties was not necessarily an act of passive conformity, but a sacrifice women made to secure their property. Such issues also exemplify how women can be stuck between traditions that stipulate that they should stay in the patrilocal home, and bullying within the patrilocal home that has the intend of driving them out.

INTIMACY AND DESIRE: AN INSURRMOUNTABLE BARRIER

It was once illegal for widowed women to remarry, but in 2002 the "11th amendment of the Civil Act legalised remarriage" (Himalayan Times, 2005). However, whilst widows are legally allowed to remarry,

in reality there are still strict norms and stigmas associated both with remarriage and with widows forming any new relationships after the death of their husbands. Participants explained that societally it was generally more acceptable for young widows, and especially those without children to remarry. Remarriage was near impossible for women who had been widowed at an older age. This is a result of societal perceptions that stipulate that older women are sexually disinteresting, and that they themselves are sexually disinterested (see above and *Chapter 4*). This said, and irrespective of age, I only came across two women amongst 91 participants who had remarried. Perhaps even more significantly only a few openly said that they had even contemplated remarriage. None of the participants spoke of having any intimate relationships following widowhood. Although this should be understood in the context of the South Asian culture, where discussions generally about intimacy are often frowned upon.

The lack of remarriage evidences an argument made above in relation to a hierarchy of restrictions whereby some traditional practices could be transgressed (in relation, for example, to wearing red, adornment, spatial restrictions) where others were much more difficult to defy. Given that most women conformed to this practice, more nuanced questions surrounding reasons for their 'observance' were required.

While not remarrying or engaging in further relationships may have seemed like an act of conforming, looking more closely at reasons behind this perceived compliance revealed the complicated nature of agential actions. It seemed that for some the decision to remarry was not necessarily an observant one. Furthermore, in a patriarchal society where women are identified in relation to men, a decision not to remarry where this was possible (for example when a woman was young), could be perceived as an act of resistance to societal norms, which stipulate the importance of women's relationships with men.

Thus, in this case decisions not to remarry, for whatever reasons, need to be explored.

Multiple reasons for not remarrying were detailed by Usha (45, 21, Newar) who made clay heaters in the Newari area of Thimi. As detailed, Usha had moved back into her maternal home, as her in-laws had started bullying her when she became widowed:

> *"I never felt that I wanted to remarry with another person. I will be happy on my own. It never came to my mind. I feel that even if I get married, I would have to do the household work and look after my child and all. I don't know what my new family will be like; maybe I will have to face the same situation of hate and domination. Now at least I can do things on my own and don't have to depend on anyone (pause)…so I felt that why should I marry again?"*

It is evident that Usha never wanted to marry in the first instance, and this was reflected in her desire to not remarry. She illustrated how marriage and living in the patrilocal home was hard work and, given her previous experience, she was unsurprisingly anxious about how another family may have treated her. It also seemed that she was happy in her *maiti* and had a sense of independence after being widowed that she did not have previously, and which she was perhaps unwilling to sacrifice.

Subhadra (50, 25, Chhetri) spoke of similar reasons for not wanting to remarry:

> *"Researcher: Since you were young when your husband passed away did you ever think about getting remarried as your husband had remarried you when his first wife passed away? Subhadra: No, it didn't come to my mind at all. If I had known things and able to speak and talk about things like now, then I would have never got married in first place. I feel like single life, like this one I have now, without any responsibilities would have been so peaceful and enjoyable. I feel if you get married you have*

> *to have all the hardships in your life, and being single you can do whatever you like, so that is what I think."*

Subhadra may have felt her hardships upon marriage more acutely as she was the second wife of her husband. Her husband's first wife had died and as she had not given birth to a son, he married Subhadra in hope of having a son. He was much older than her, she was fifteen when she married and he was over fifty *(Subhadra did not know his exact age)*. While Usha and Subhadra were widowed at an age where they could have potentially remarried, the restrictions concerned with remarriage were even stricter at that time, which would have made it harder for them to do so even had they wished it. At the time of interview, Usha and Subhadra were perceived as being too 'old' to remarry. Although, Usha and Subhadra explained that they did not want to remarry, this does posit questions about possible internalisation.

Other participants felt that remarriage would not improve their social status, as they would still be 'women'. Sharda (45, 24, Newar) explained:

> *"I don't feel getting remarried is good thing. For example if I get married again, then it will only change my status to a married woman, I am still a woman after all. Others things I have to face it all again, my karma and my fate won't change. I feel like if I get married again, then I will face more hardships than this. The society will also look down upon me, hate me or say bad things about me".*

Sharda details the various reasons for not remarrying, but most interestingly she felt that her status would not improve, as she was still *a woman*. In this way, Sharda could not separate her marital status from her gender, reiterating the entangled nature of intersectional identities. Furthermore, her belief in fate and karma meant she thought her life would be the same regardless of whether she remarried. Notably, with regard to remarriage, Sharda also went on to say "*but if I work hard and work diligently then society may respect me, love me and care about me."*

Thus, by not remarrying Sharda was able to project her identity as a hard-working woman and gain respect, love and support as a result of this (see also below).

Even though her in-laws actively encouraged her to remarry, Narbada (28, 24, Newar) did not want to and similarly had multiple reasons for this. As explained previously, Narbada was the WHR coordinator for her local area. She also ran a hardware shop and was the sole earner in her family. At the time of participation, her work with WHR was going well, and she hoped that she would be able to get paid full time. Although WHR does not limit its employees to widowed women who are not remarried, Narbada may have not been able to continue her activism in the community, and the respect she had gained as a widowed women, in the same way had she remarried. This reiterates the way in which social identities, in this case marital status, can contribute both to intersectional *privilege* and *marginalisation* (see *Chapter 4*).

Through her work with WHR, and her endeavours in fulfilling her husband's role within the family, she spoke of how she had gained a lot of independence and respect within her *ghar* and the wider community. By not remarrying she was able to emphasise and maintain her identity as a hard-working mother, the main breadwinner in the family and a dutiful widow. Narbada's situation highlights the current and future rewards women received for their hard work and dutiful behaviour towards their in-laws. Furthermore, her reasons for not remarrying were also somewhat echoed in a conversation at the start of this chapter. Here, Narbada was referring to remarriage, illustrating that men remarry, as they need women to support them, but women - as they are strong, capable and independent, do not need men, thus they do not need to remarry. Consequently, in this way her desire not to remarry could have been perceived not as an act of observance, but an

empowered decision and a means of reinforcing her independence as a strong and capable woman.

In many instances it seemed that acts of conformity regarding relationships and not remarrying were for the benefit of a widow's children. This connects to the discussion in the previous chapter that detailed how women's well-being was highly centred around their children. Participants commonly stressed that they did not want to remarry due to concern for the welfare of their children. Srijana (40, 27, Chhetri) who had two children (22 and 24 years old) noted:

> *"Many single women (widows), thinking of their children do not get remarried. They think that their children will have a hard life with the new father and maybe society will say bad things about them. So they give up everything for their children, this is within every woman."*

As she was widowed a young age, Srijana would have had more acceptance from society to remarry. However thinking about the needs of children, and perhaps how society would perceive her, she did not consider it. Meera (36, 25, Damai) also explained how she did not want to remarry because of her three children (13, 16 and 17 years old) who she might have been expected to leave behind in her *maiti*:

> *"I don't want to marry again because my children are still young and they will say mother if you get married again you will leave us and then we will not even get to eat. We will become orphans. That makes me scared so I don't want to remarry."*

Looking at this more broadly it seemed that women might have observed restrictions around remarrying because by doing so they were able to build the identity of a dutiful mother. By being perceived as 'good mothers', women were perhaps able to gain more respect in the wider community, enabling them to enact agency in another capacity in the future or the present time (see Ramnarain, 2014). If widowed women remarried they would subsequently not be seen as

'struggling' and 'hardworking', and therefore possibly not earn this respect (see above related to Narbada).

Related to this, some women expressed that by working hard for their family, widowed women earned more respect than married women. As detailed in *Chapter 4*, Indu (38, 31, Brahman) felt happier and more independent in widowhood. She also explained how she received praise and respect in the community because she was doing 'better' than when her husband was alive:

> *"People see me doing things. They say, 'she's single and still doing so many things. She's so busy. When her husband was alive they weren't really doing well and now all by herself she's doing so much better'. Now everybody, friends, family, the village, the community, everyone praises me."*

This relates to Lenette's (2013) research that illustrates how women can receive praise and respect for their financial independence and achievements as single widowed mothers. Santu Kumari (50, 41, Achami) also emphasised that widows get *"more respect than married women"* because "*they have to face various hardships and have hard time in trying to achieve things"*. Romita (60, 48, Sunuwar), a Christian woman who lived in the rural area of Phutung, explained how she felt widows could receive more respect as they got older for enduring difficulties and hardships associated with widowhood.

> *"In society single women (widows) are blamed and bitched about. Even if they talk with men regarding something innocent, the community will start backbiting about her and blaming her. They will be constantly nagging her, but after spending all those years doing good and also listening to the constant nagging, once they get older, society will learn of the good she is doing and they will respect her. She will receive the respect as she gets older."*

Here Romita detailed how women could be rewarded for putting up with the 'nagging and 'backbiting' when they become older. She also referred to 'doing good'. Through the course of this research, I came to

understand this as working hard to look after children, observing the restrictions and expectations associated with widowhood and not remarrying. In this way, it was difficult to distinguish between acts that made women appear like 'hard working mothers' and those that made them appear as 'devoted wives and widows', as adhering to restrictions was in many ways congruent with both.

By positioning her identity as a hard working mother and a 'lower' class woman, Arya (44, 31, Chhetri) was able to justify her involvement in employment that was seen as immoral and immodest. Arya was a mother of four; she did not have the opportunity to go to school and worked as a sex worker in the tourist area of Thamel. Arya spoke of how other women in the community questioned her about her work. She replied by telling them she was working hard to educate and look after her children:

> *"I am not lying or cheating. I am doing whatever I can and what am able to. It is hard work that matters. I told her I am not educated so that I can become an officer and earn salary; this is what life has given me so I accept it. You do what your life tells you. I am working hard for my children to have a good life".*

Importantly Ramnarain (2014: 11) stresses that "motherhood, while still rooted in a patriarchal conceptualization of women's social roles, allowed women to carve a space for agency". These examples more generally illustrate how by building the identities of dutiful mothers and widows, women can secure more respect, autonomy and benefits both at the present time and in the future (Lamb, 2000 and Ramnarain, 2014). This was echoed in *Chapter 5* where women stressed how by focusing on their children, they hoped to receive reciprocal support in the future. Agarwal (1994: 435) states, "instances where women appear to sacrifice their short-term welfare for the benefit of their families and kin could be reinterpreted as an investment towards their future security." These examples illustrate the importance of adopting a life-

course approach and considering wider temporality when exploring agency.

This section has explored the agential actions associated with remarriage and intimate relationships. Given that only two participants had remarried, none spoke of any intimate relationships and only a few had considered remarriage, there were few definitive and immediately evident acts of resistance. As a result more nuanced questions surrounding reasons for their 'observance' were required. In doing so, reasons for compliance were revealed, such as building the identity of devoted mothers and wives, and generating and maintaining independence and respect. Furthermore, as stated, the decision not to remarry could have in fact been an act of resistance to societal norms which dictate that a woman's identity should be tied to a man's. However, ultimately, it was not wholly possible to ascertain the extent to which these acts of observance were personal choices, whether these restrictions were in some way internalised, or women were embarrassed to admit they felt forced into conforming. Furthermore, it should be noted that although most women did not want to remarry, there were a few who did say that they would consider getting remarried in the future or if the opportunity to marry someone they liked arouse. Thus, none of the participants were actively looking to remarry at the time of interview.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has illustrated the complicated nature of widowed women's agential actions, focusing on practices broadly concerned with adornment, spatiality and relationships. By privileging agential practices, rather than acts of resisting and conforming, the nuances of agency were uncovered, as was the synonymity between resisting and conforming. This echoes Mahmood's (2005) research, which stresses

that women's agency should be understood through the varying practices and forms in which it is enacted. Most notably, iterations of resistance were more compliant than they initially appeared, and conversely acts of conformity were subtly informed by resistance.

In terms of cultural practices associated with adornment it was evident that widowed women often resisted these, particularly where they were able to call upon some kind of wider support, whether this was in the form of their deceased husbands' wishes, family members, older women, friends, wider community or god. Thus, while widowed women went against certain practices, they simultaneously conformed by seeking approval through existing patriarchal and hierarchical structures. The creative ways in which women negotiated restrictions by playing traditions and their gendered roles against each other were particularly marked. While some women conformed to practices associated with widowhood, there were a myriad reasons for this observance beyond the fear of retribution for non-observance. For example, they conformed to traditions to free their husbands' souls, to secure the approval of society, to protect their children, for their spiritual health and because it was their own personal choice. However, the extent to which this was a 'choice' is debatable, as since they are a product of the society in which they grew up, women's attitudes could have been internalised. Further to this, women pushed the boundaries of acceptance by observing practices for a certain period or observing the most basic rules. Viewed as such, these actions can be interpreted as lying somewhere between conforming and resisting, reiterating the need for an agential continuum.

Although many of the restrictions associated with widowhood have eased, there are still some restrictions that remain difficult for women to subvert. Constraints around remarrying and engaging in further relationships appeared to be somewhat insurmountable. As highlighted in the main discussion, in this research no one disclosed having a

relationship with another man, only a few said they would even consider remarriage and only two women had actually remarried (see above). This echoes the point that agential action varied considerably according to the specific norm being transgressed. For example, participants were much more likely to wear shades of red than they were to wear *pote* or *sindur*, and they were much more likely to wear *pote* or *sindur* than they were to remarry or openly engage in another relationship.

This chapter has also detailed how agential actions were further shaped by temporality, eschatological beliefs and social identities. For example a women's older physiological age often inhibited her ability to transgress gendered practices, as too did a women's 'higher' caste status. It was also evident that women to some extent observed and resisted norms to support the generation of positive karma, fate or to ensure their husband had a peaceful afterlife. With regard to life-course and temporality, women often adhered to norms for certain periods of time allowing them greater freedom thereafter. In other cases, through building the identity of a dutiful widow and devoted mother, women were able to gain more respect in the future.

Given that there is little research that explores the complexity of agential actions amongst widowed women, this thesis makes an important contribution to scholarship on widowhood. Conceptually, the study develops theorisations of agency within geography, and gender and development studies by introducing an agential continuum. The particular attention to spatiality and temporality illustrates how agential iterations vary along a continuum through space and time.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

REVISITING REKHA

Out of 91 participants in this research, it was Rekha's (45, 41, Pudasaini) life and circumstances that would have been the most suitable for a documentary about the plight of widowed women (see *Chapter 1*). I was briefly introduced to Rekha by my friend and interpreter Arya, and visited her home before subsequently undertaking an interview with her. During this initial meeting, I was shocked to see how she lived; Rekha squatted with her three daughters in a makeshift hut in Mulpani (see *Figure 7.1*). I left upset, and some feelings I had when I first watched the documentary in 2009 resurfaced. However, this thesis, with its overarching aim to ***interrogate understandings of widowhood through the prism of intersectionality, well-being and agency***, illustrates that the lives of women like Rekha are much more nuanced, complex and colourful than most existing frameworks, and the documentary, depict. In this concluding chapter, I extrapolate the key contributions of this research, beginning with a more nuanced narration of Rekha's 'desperate' story.

Figure 7.1: Rekha pictured with her daughter outside her home in Mulpani

(Source: researchers own photograph, Mulpani, March 2014)

By getting to know Rekha I was able to understand how her multiple identities as a woman, as a mother, as a 'lower' caste member of society, as a 'squatter' and as a Hindu shaped her myriad experiences of widowhood, her conceptualisations of well-being and her enactments of agency. Furthermore, through a life-course approach, I was able to understand that widowhood was one of the many difficulties she had faced. Rekha was married when she was just nine years old to a man 16 years her senior. Her story reflected a broader societal acceptance, where daughters belonging to families that are financially unstable often get married at a young age, and to men who are much older. Her family's impoverishment was largely attributable to an intersection of their 'lower' caste and class position. Rekha gave birth to her first daughter at 15. However, because she had given birth to a girl rather than a boy, her husband abused both her and her daughter. Her infant daughter later died, as did her husband six years later. She remarried and was happy with her new husband, but he committed suicide when she was 41. Thus, Rekha faced widowhood once again, but this time mourning the loss of a beloved partner. Importantly, it was not only Rekha's status as a widow that shaped her life, but also her multiple interlocking identities and previous life experiences.

Upon first meeting Rekha, and witnessing her living conditions, one could have easily assumed that in terms of her well-being she would be primarily concerned with money and material needs. Although Rekha had no home of her own, and struggled to earn enough food to feed herself and her children, I found that her faith and family were as central to her well-being as money and income. For someone who has faced such adversities Rekha, perhaps surprisingly, had seemingly limitless stores of hope. In one of our conversations, this is how she perceived her situation:

> *"People like me, you see, what do we have to lose? Even rich people when they die they cannot take anything. So as long as you are alive, we have to live happily."*

She lived by this philosophy and tried to be happy regardless of her seemingly 'desperate' situation. Furthermore, reciting Rekha's story one could think she was powerless and vulnerable. Rekha often visited offices and Government buildings in central Kathmandu where she begged for money. When she begged, she put on her best clothes, showed a picture of her hut and explained her situation. On the surface, begging like this may seem degrading and disempowering, but Rekha said that she was proud of how she found the courage to visit these offices and how she has managed to support her children despite all her adversities. Similarly she resisted restrictions associated with widowed women by wearing red. In fact, she commented, "*he (referring to her husband) cannot take my identity with him. I like red more than other colour".* Further to this, upon becoming widowed the first time, Rekha remarried, and was one of only two women in the research to do so. This was significant, as restrictions associated with remarriage are very difficult to transgress as elaborated upon in this thesis. Evidently, whilst Rekha could have been considered to be 'impoverished' and 'vulnerable', I also found her to be a positive, resilient and, at times, stubborn individual who did not want Arya or I to pity her. Rekha once said to us:

> *"I still have the feeling that I am going to show people that I can do things and that I can survive; people wanted to chase me away from this village. Then that made me determined to live in this village and survive. I don't listen to what people say".*

I think this photograph helps to capture her essence *(Figure 7.2)*. By tracing Rekha's story some of the conclusions of this thesis have been delineated, as has the importance of researching widowhood in more dynamic, expansive and empowering ways. Building upon this, the remainder of this chapter will outline the broader theoretical, methodological and policy based contributions of this study in terms of widowhood specifically, and gender and development studies more broadly. The chapter will conclude by outlining intended routes of dissemination.

Figure 7.2: Rekha pictured outside Indu's home in Mulpani

(Source: researchers own photograph, Mulpani, March 2014)

INTERSECTIONALITY, WELL-BEING AND AGENCY: A PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE

By detailing the conclusions of this thesis, the following section highlights the contributions it makes to scholarship on widowhood specifically, and gender and development more broadly. Through an intersectional life-course approach this thesis has identified how the multiple identities of widowed women and their varying life experiences shaped the consequent experience of widowhood. Importantly, by implementing an intersectional life-course approach, this thesis progresses existing research that has predominantly tended to focus on the identity of 'widowed' and the period of 'widowhood'; and in doing so it also builds on scholarly research from Kelly (2015) who argues for the integration of these two approaches.

Consequently, through its intersectional approach, this work makes a significant contribution to the scant work on widowhood that deploys an intersectional lens (see Datta, 2008; Korang-Okrah, 2011; Korang-Okrah and Haight, 2015; Ramnarain, 2014 and 2016). Furthermore, existing studies also tend to privilege the period of 'widowhood' (see for example; Chakravarti, 1995; Datta, 2008; Giri (ed.), 2002; Haase, 2008; Jensen, 2005; Parkes and Prigerson, 2010; Yadav, 2016). By decentring widowhood and paying attention to the whole life-course, this research has not only contextualised embedded experiences, but also shown that widowhood was not necessarily the most significant event or period in a woman's life. In this way this thesis builds on small body of work from scholars who, through their use of a life-course (Chambers, 2002 and 2005) or oral history approach (Galvin, 2005; Lamb, 2000 and Ramnarain, 2016), stress the need to look at the whole life-course in order to understand more about widowhood. Critically, in doing this, this research also delineated that some women felt *better off* upon the demise of their husbands. This confronts scholarly work on widowhood and the 'feminisation of poverty' that contends that

widowed women and female-headed households are always negatively affected by their single status.

Whilst a variety of social identities were considered, and intersectionality was explored throughout this thesis (see *Chapters 5* and *6*), the social identities of age and caste were particularly central in shaping widowhood. Furthermore, by highlighting the importance of caste and age in shaping women's and widow's lives, especially amongst women within a South Asian context, this thesis has re-embedded these often-overlooked social identities within intersectional theory. Although caste (see Chen and Drèze, 1992, 1995; Datta, 2008; Galvin, 2005; Haviland et al., 2014; Jensen, 2005; Mari Bhat, 1994) and age (see Chen, 2000; Drèze and Srinivasan, 1997; Haase, 2008; Jensen, 2005; Lamb, 2000; Lenette, 2013; Rahman et al., 1992; O'Bryant, 1988; Hill et al., 1988 and Weir and Willis, 2000) have been somewhat considered within scholarship on widowhood, research detailing the experiences of widowed women at the confluence of these identities, and other social identities, is limited.

This work has explored the varying experiences of widowhood according to caste, and how widowhood was, generally, a more restrictive experience for 'high' caste Hindu women as compared to 'lower' caste, indigenous and non-Hindu women. Given their ambiguous position in the caste system, the complex and contradictory situation for Newari women was detailed. Although previous research on widowhood in Nepal and India has also explored caste, much of this has focused on 'higher' caste widows, to the extent that an 'intersectional' exploration is minimal (see Chen and Drèze, 1992, 1995; Datta, 2008; Giri, (ed.) 2002; Haviland et al., 2014; Lamb, 2000; Jensen, 2005 and Mari Bhat, 1994; Sabri et al., 2016). As a result, scholarly research detailing the unique situation of indigenous and 'lower' caste widows also remains sparse, as do studies that explore the differing experiences of widowhood according to religion (notable exceptions include

Korang-Okrah and Haight, 2015; Lamb, 2000; Lenette, 2014; Ramnarain, 2014 and 2016; Yadav, 2016). In Nepal the unique situation for Newari widows was, until now, uninvestigated. By documenting the varying experiences of widowhood according to a range of castes and religions, and the specific experience of Newari widows, this thesis is a significant addition to studies of widowhood in Nepal and further afield. Furthermore, through its intersectional approach it contributes to broader studies of caste and gender.

Age when widowed emerged as a significant factor shaping widowhood, and the general consensus among both younger and older women was that widowhood was more difficult for younger women. In particular participants reflected that younger widows often had to deal with suspicion in the patrilocal home, the grief of losing their husband at a young age, thus potentially facing a long life on their own, and if they had children then also stresses associated with their children's subsistence and education. This said, women widowed at an older age faced other difficulties, paramount among which their dependence on their children. Living in a society in which adult children are expected to look after their elderly parents, the experiences of older widows varied such that while some were looked after and respected by their family and wider community, others faced considerable verbal and physical abuse and were often cheated out of their property. Such contrasting experiences can be explained through the changing familial expectations and roles, and the decreasing desire to live in extended families.

Yet, whilst experiences of widowhood were in some way specific to age, they did not always follow anticipated patterns, and also varied according to other social cleavages such as class, religion, education and caste, and according to other life experiences. As detailed in *Chapter 1* and *2,* much of the existing research on widowhood focuses on older women, and widowhood sits as an issue within studies of older women

more generally. However, surprisingly, specifically in the Nepali context, the focus has been almost entirely on younger widows (Haviland et al., 2014; Ramnarain 2014, 2016 and Yadav, 2016 and Sabri, 2016), and the experience of older widows in this context remains overlooked. Therefore, by exploring widowhood at varying ages, including younger, middle-aged and older widows, this thesis makes important contributions to research on widowhood in Nepal and beyond.

Within this discussion of age, the contrasting ways in which widowhood shaped feelings of ageing were delineated. Some women felt older as a result of their widowhood and the cultural practices that intend to induce premature ageing. However, other women felt younger as a consequence of the independence, struggle and responsibility associated with their marital status. Significantly, it also detailed that for women married at a young age, widowhood afforded them the opportunity to 'reclaim' their youth. Perceived in this way, ageing was not always a linear trajectory through the life-course nor was it uniformly experienced in the same way. This thesis supports academic work that explores the complexity of ageing amongst widowed women (DiGiulio, 1989; Lamb, 2000), and expands on it by delineating possible feelings of *regressive* ageing or 'agelessness' (Kaufman, 1986). In this way it also contributes to wider scholarship that strives to complicate understandings of ageing (Hockey and James, 1993; Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Versa Sanso, 2006). Furthermore, to date, there is little research that explores ageing in Nepal (with the exceptions of Cook and Halshall, 2012; Parker et al., 2014; Shrestha and Shrestha, 2014), and even less that investigates the 'feminisation of ageing' or gendered experiences of ageing (see Shrestha 2010; Shrestha and Zarit, 2014); thus, this work makes a critical contribution to studies of ageing within the Nepali context.

Like Rekha, women in this research conceptualised well-being in myriad ways, and not only through their monetary and material needs. However, until now, scholarship on widowhood has been predominantly focused on orthodox conceptions of poverty associated with income (Drèze and Srinivasan, 1997; Holden, 1988; Weir and Willis, 2000), mortality rates and health (Chen and Drèze, 1992; Mari Bhat, 1994), and dispossession (Owen, 1996; Young, 2006). Others have concentrated on negative aspects of widowhood such as depression, low moral, bereavement and loneliness (see Chen and Drèze, 1995; Jensen, 2005; Momtaz et al., 2011; Sasson and Umberson, 2014; Stroebe and Stroebe, 1983). By centring poverty, impoverishment and the negative factors associated with widowhood, the potential ways in which widowhood could improve the lives of women are overlooked, as is the complexity of what it means to live well more generally. Although some studies have explored widowhood through the more progressive lens of well-being, their focus has been narrow, purely focusing on the economic (Angel et al., 2007; Jensen, 2005; Ofstedal et al., 2004; Tareque et al., 2014) or physiological aspects (Bennett, 2005; Bisconti et al., 2004; Sasson and Umberson, 2014). Therefore an approach, which accounts for all dimensions of material, perceptual and relational well-being, and does not solely examine the aspects which hinder well-being, is an important advancement to theories of widowhood. Furthermore, this work is the first that documents, rather than measures, embedded conceptualisations of well-being, and is also the first known study to explore well-being amongst Nepali widows.

Participants' conceptualisations of well-being were broadly categorised as material, perceptual and relational. Dimensions of material well-being were predominantly concerned with basic needs, education, employment, income and property ownership. However, in addition to their immediate and universal needs, participants detailed how these aspects of well-being were critical as they enabled them to be independent, and thus maintain respect and status in the community.

Perceptual aspects of well-being commonly included confidence, independence and faith. In turn, confidence and independence were understood in a highly relational way; for instance, confidence was often sought through children, and independence was considered with reference to the wider community and societal codes of conduct. Children, family and friendships were central to relational well-being. Whilst aspects of well-being loosely fitted into the categories of material, perceptual and relational, they were interwoven and entangled in diverse ways. For example, education and employment underpinned perceptual aspects of well-being like confidence and independence and vice versa. Furthermore, the critical importance of relationships in shaping all aspects of well-being was reiterated throughout.

Understandings of well-being were also shaped by social identities, such as caste, age and class, by previous incidences in the life-course and current life-stages. In the context of social identities, older people and Christian women were often primarily concerned with their faith. Previous impoverishment and difficulty in fulfilling basic needs influenced current perceptions of well-being. In other instances, a woman's current need for money to educate her children meant that income was the most critical aspect of her well-being. Thus, in this way her life-stage and her children's influenced her conceptions of well-being. Interestingly, whilst some women's conceptions of well-being did change upon widowhood, for many women their family had always been central to their well-being. This again highlights the need to decentre widowhood and consider the whole life-course when investigating conceptualisations of well-being.

By exploring conceptualisations of well-being and how they were predominantly categorised in terms of material, perceptual and relational, this thesis builds on the WED approach (see *Chapter 2* and *5*). However, it adapts it slightly by replacing subjective with perceptual

well-being; this was done on the basis that all conceptions are 'subjective', and therefore 'subjective well-being' should not be limited to one particular dimension. Importantly, through its utilisation of intersectionality and temporality, this research contributes to existing theorisations on well-being. Kertzner et al. (2009), Schulz and Mullings (2006) and Seaton et al. (2010) explore intersectionality and well-being. They do so, however, within the specific contexts of psychological and physiological well-being, while this thesis considers all aspects of well-being. Importantly, by detailing how well-being can change temporally and over the life-course, it also builds on existing studies by White (2008, 2009 and 2010) and Wright (2011a). With its intersectional life-course lens, this thesis contributes to studies of well-being, and is one of the first, along with Ziegler (2012) to do so.

As detailed in *Chapter 2*, previous studies of widowhood have predominantly focused on widowed women as vulnerable (Anjuli, 2011; Chen and Drèze, 1995; Mohindra et al., 2012), marginalised (Chen, 2000; Young, 2006), discriminated (Owen, 1996) and widows as sufferers (Dutt and Harma, 2010). However, there are some important contributions that have catalysed scholarly attention to widows' agency, debunking representations of widows as vulnerable and helpless victims (see Datta, 2008; Korang-Okrah, 2011; Lamb, 2000; Ramnarain 2014, 2016; Yadav, 2016). Consequently, my research sits within this body of work and expands on it by introducing an agential continuum, and by exploring how agency is shaped by social identities, temporality and eschatological beliefs concerning fate, karma and the after-life.

Importantly, by focusing on agential practices concerned with adornment, spatiality and relationships, and refraining from viewing these as either acts of 'resistance' or 'conforming' specifically, the nuances and subtleties of agency were uncovered. In particular this research revealed the simultaneity of resisting and conforming. What

was particularly marked was that women often resisted with the approval or authority of another; this could be the support of their deceased husbands, family members, older women and/or the wider community. Thus, as permission was often sought through traditional hierarchical and patriarchal structures, acts of resistance were not entirely 'transgressive'. Similarly, through this nuanced approach to agency, this thesis has illustrated how within acts of perceived observance there were also subtle undertones of resistance. Viewed in these ways, actions can never be wholly considered as observant or resistive, such that both can, and do, occur concurrently. Consequently, this thesis proposes that agency should be understood within an agential continuum. Through its theorisation in the form of a continuum, this research makes an important contribution to broader scholarly research on gendered agency, which highlights the intricate nature of agential actions and how they can simultaneously involve resisting and conforming (Butler, 2009; Mahmood, 2005; Ramnarain, 2014 and 2016). Yet this work furthers existing work, highlighting the simultaneity of resisting and conforming, within a continuum approach (see *Chapter 2*). With its focus on spatiality and temporality, this thesis illustrates how agential iterations vary along the continuum across space and time.

The way in which widowed women used their identities, for example as mothers or Newari women, and traditions within Nepali culture, to assert agency was also identified. Such understandings build on Kabeer's theory (2001: 47) on the "structures of constraint". Such that women use patriarchal structures, and their roles within such structures as wives, mothers and, in the case of this work, as devoted widows, to negotiate their agency. Related to this, widowed women not only reproduced norms but also concurrently pushed the boundaries of acceptance by observing practices in relation to widowhood for specific periods of time or by observing only the most basic rules. In doing so this work this builds on the studies by Butler (2009) and Katz (2004),

and such perspectives reiterate the broader need to position agency within the context of power structures and norms (see also Abu-Lughod, 1990; Butler, 2009; Williams et al., 2011). Furthermore, the hierarchical nature of norms and the way in which agency differed according to the norm being transgressed was detailed. These enactments were further contextualised by setting them in the context of spatiality, temporality, intersectional identities and eschatological beliefs. To date, research on agency within the context of eschatological beliefs such as fate and karma is limited to Mahmood (2005), thus this thesis makes a significant contribution.

These three concepts, intersectionality, well-being and agency, complement and strengthen each other; they combine to form a productive dialogue and provide a more nuanced and progressive approach through which widowhood can be researched. These theorisations have taken us on a journey, one that traces the nuances and complexities of widowhood. In doing so, this thesis has satisfied its aims of (i). ***exploring the diverse experiences of widowhood through an intersectional life-course lens,*** (ii). ***conceptualising well-being from the embedded perspective of widowed women*** and (iii). ***examining the multiple and complex ways in which widowed women assert agency.***

METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The contributions this research makes are predominantly theoretical, however it also makes some important methodological contributions. By adopting the method of oral histories, the research highlighted that the experience of widowhood was a product of other life experiences, and that it was not necessarily the most significant stage in shaping women's lives. Most importantly, by using this method I was able to

establish that some women's lives actually improved upon the demise of their husbands. This method was therefore seminal in deconstructing assumptions that widowhood is wholly a negative experience, and that female-headed households are always 'worse off' without their husbands. By adopting this method, this research builds on existing studies of widowhood that use an oral history approach (see Galvin, 2005; Lamb, 2000 and Ramnarain, 2016) and a life-course methodology (Chambers, 2002 and 2005).

Through its method of recruitment, this thesis has made some contributions to current research specifically on Nepali widows. Much of the existing scholarly work, excluding Galvin (2005) and Ramnarain (2014 and 2016), used WHR to recruit *all* of their participants (see Haviland et al., 2014; Sabri et al. 2016; Yadav, 2016). As mentioned in *Chapter 3*, widowed women who are members of organisations often have training and discussions together, meaning certain commonalities surface; this is obviously particularly acute when all participants are members of the same organisation, in this case WHR. Furthermore, Haviland et al's (2014), Ramnarain (2014 and 2016) Sabri et al's (2016) and Yadav (2016) studies were all conducted with young women. Their age and their group membership of WHR would have made their experience of widowhood particularly distinct. In my study, while some participants were recruited through WHR and other gatekeepers, 49 participants were not recruited through any gatekeeper organisations and were found through my own personal networks, and they varied in age from 21 to 85 years old. Evidently, this research deviates from most existing scholarship that has focused on younger women and recruited solely through WHR.

POLICY RELATED CONTRIBUTIONS

At this point it is important to detail the contributions this work can make with regard to policy. Due to pressure from the Loomba Foundation, from other international umbrella organisations such as Widows For Peace Through Democracy (WPD) and national based organisations across the world like WHR, the UN has increasingly identified the specific issues faced by widows. For example, the 'Widows Charter' (Widows for Peace through Democracy, 2016) has been integrated into the CEDAW convention (Committee for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) and the UN officially established the first 'International Widows Day' in 2010 (Loomba Foundation, 2016).

However, although widowhood has been recognised to a certain degree by development bodies, WPD and The Loomba Foundation are still fighting for aspects of the CEDAW convention to be amended and for more recognition of the specific plight of widowed women. For instance, WPD issued a statement directed at CEDAW for not highlighting the particular issues widowed women face in accessing justice (WPD, 2014). The Loomba Foundation report (2015) also protests that while countries signed up to the CEDAW convention are legally obliged to uphold these acts, in reality they are weakly upheld. The report (2015: 147) further highlights the lack of action at an international level:

> "Nothing tangible has been done at international level to tackle disinheritance, property and land "grabbing", ritual cleansing, enforced sex with relatives, social stigma, their *descent (sic)* into poverty from which there is often no return, or other issues specific to widows and their children."

Further to this, there is no mention of widows in the recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although the UN has started to check each

individual member country for statistics on marital status, the data on widowhood remains largely limited to the reports published by The Loomba Foundation. (Dutt and Harma, 2010; Loomba Foundation, 2015). These reports (2010 and 2015) illustrate the discriminatory practices associated with widowhood and are the most comprehensive global studies of widowhood; "there has been no comprehensive global study on the deprivation faced by widows and their children before the publication of the Global Widows Reports" (The Loomba Foundation, 2015: 13).

Due to the lack of global research on widowhood these reports are constitute an integral part of existing research. However, their focus is almost entirely on the negative impacts, for example poverty, land grabbing, social stigma, witchcraft and violence. This is perhaps understandable given their broader motivation to embed widowhood within the development agenda. Yet, by solely looking at the negative implications of widowhood, and overlooking the important nuances and multiple experiences of widowed women, these reports somewhat limit what we can understand about the issue. It seems that future policy based research, akin to academic research, needs to find more progressive, dynamic and expansive ways of exploring widowhood. By collaborating and building relationships with these international organisations, I hope this thesis can support their on-going work and make contributions to research in terms of international policy (see below about dissemination).

As detailed in *Chapter 1*, I have been working with WHR since 2010, and I will continue to do so after this doctoral research. Through this on-going collaboration, my work can support WHR's activism, and consequently make a contribution to policy81; It can influence their

81 WHR have been integral in changing many discriminatory laws and policies related to widowed women in Nepal. At the time of my research they were collaborating with the Nepali MOWCSW to develop a 'National Action Plan for Widows in Nepal' (Key Informant Interview: MOWCSW). WHR were also working with

work in a number of ways. First, this is a substantive study of nearly one hundred qualitative interviews and oral histories; this is a huge resource WHR can use to contribute towards their on-going efforts. Importantly, much of the data WHR collects, and will collect with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MOWCSW), is quantitative, and this rich qualitative data will complement their existing and future research. Furthermore, with its 'academic' rigour this research can boost WHR's portfolio of research, adding another dynamic to it. It can also increase its recognition as an organisation and build awareness within academia and the development sphere of the issues facing Nepali widows. Second, this substantive study includes experiences of widowhood across a range of castes, ages, religions, and other social identities, providing WHR with a detailed resource that documents the multiple experiences of widowhood. Third, half of the participants in this work were not recruited through WHR nor were they WHR members. Thus, with this work can help to inform WHR about the experiences of widowed women currently outside their reach. In addition, some of these women formed their own groups independently without WHR's guidance; WHR can use this research and the contacts I have made to widen their networks and to see how these women can be supported. WHR may also be able to learn about alternative forms of organising from these autonomous groups. Fourth, when developing policies specifically related to well-being, WHR and MOWCSW can use this work to determine the aspects of well-being which are important to the widows themselves.

WHR is the only organisation working exclusively for widowed women in Nepal, therefore this work will be most significant to them. However, I also intend to collaborate, and continue communication with other key informants from INGO's and NGO's (see below on dissemination). For example, this thesis with its focus on ageing, will be of benefit to organisations like HelpAge as it will provide them with information

MOWCSW aiding them to collect data on widowed women. Notably, Nepal is the second country in South Asia to collect data on widowed women at a national level.

about the issues for older widows, their conceptions of well-being and their experiences of ageing. Its significance is even more prevalent given the increasingly female and ageing society. In terms of wider civil society, I have written an article for a Nepali magazine (Solley, 2014) about widowhood, which has helped to build awareness of the issue of widowhood and its complexities within the public domain.

DISSEMINATING

Through the dissemination of this research, my continued work with widowed women pursing new and important lines of inquiry I hope to bring attention to the issue of widowhood and initiate social change. In this following section I explore my pathways to dissemination in the context of widowed women themselves, the gatekeeper organisations, international development organisations and wider academia.

Most importantly, I am visiting Nepal in Autumn 2016 and I will spend some time with my participants. I want to visit them and their families and see how they have been coping since the earthquakes. As stated in *Chapter 3*, I formed strong connections with many of my participants and have been communicating with them, either through social media or through my friends in Nepal, while I have been in London. I promised as soon as my thesis was complete, I would return to see them. I know many of them wanted to read this thesis, so I will write a shorter document that can be given or read out to them in Nepali. I will specifically highlight the areas in the thesis where they are quoted. Visiting and spending time with them is my first priority, and of course maintaining these relationships will be integral to any future work I may conduct.

In Nepal I will share my research with WHR, the other gatekeeper organisations I worked with, and with the key informants I interviewed

(see above). As detailed above I intended to spend most of my time collaborating with WHR and HelpAge. I will work with these organisations investigating the ways in which I can turn this thesis into documents in English and Nepali that will be of benefit to them. This will also provide an opportunity for the translators I worked with to be co-authors of the research. I shall produce both documents that will be useful on a more short-term basis, and those that can help with their longer-term goals.

In terms of academic dissemination, between completing this thesis and returning from Nepal, I intend to write four articles based on life-course, ageing, agency and 'working with' interpreters. A paper on life-course and oral history methodology will importantly detail the need to de-centre the incidence of widowhood, outline how women's well-being can improve upon widowhood, and how widows are not always negatively affected by their marital status. This will contribute to wider debates that deconstruct the 'feminisation of poverty', and those on widowhood which maintain that widowhood is a wholly negative experience. Another article will document the complexities of ageing amongst Nepali widows; it will particularly highlight the growing issues for older widowed women within the context of the changing Nepali society, and the ways in which widowed women can feel a renewed sense of youth upon widowhood. The paper on agency will trace the complex and contradictory ways in which widowed women assert agency, and show how agential iterations such as wearing red can be simultaneously perceived as resisting and conforming. I will also co-author a paper with Arya, with whom I have shared my on-going ethnographic work, about the critical role of research assistants and translators within fieldwork and the co-production of research. We will draw on both of our experiences of working together for the past six years.

I also hope that this research can contribute not only to the academic debates on widowhood, but to wider debates within the development sector. I believe that this thesis can support and inform the global debate on widowhood and the continuing endeavours of international organisations like the Loomba Foundation and Widows For Peace Through Democracy (WPD). Thus, my intention is to make contact with these organisations and explore ways in which this research could be useful to them (see above). As detailed previously I think that this study's focus beyond the negative issues associated with widowhood will add greater depth to existing work.

CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIAL CHANGE: RECOMMENDATIONS

My desire for social change initiated this research interest in 2009 and has been a central motivation of this doctoral research; given this it is important in this concluding chapter to provide some recommendations to the stakeholder organisations who currently provide services to widows directly or indirectly, or who are looking to provide them in the future. These recommendations are based on both the research conducted for this thesis and my six-year long engagement with Nepali widows. The recommendations and interventions I suggest are primarily based around i*). research* ii). *service provision* and iii). *advocacy and lobbying*. I categorise these recommendations as such as I am aware that different stakeholders and organisations have varying purposes.

The first main recommendation for organisations with a focus on research is to continue research on widowhood. Whilst academic and organisational based research on widowhood in Nepal is growing, it is still very limited. More specifically I recommend that research is conducted out side of central areas, with women of varying castes and

ages, and with those who are not affiliated with an organisation. As detailed in *Chapters 1* and *2*, to date research on Nepali widows has tended to focus on 'middle' and 'higher' caste women, on younger women and those who are members of WHR. Research on older widowed women is particularly critical as Nepal has an increasingly ageing population, and as a result growing numbers of older widowed women and men.

Institutions that have a focus on research should strive to understand widowhood in a more complex way. This thesis particularly highlighted the benefits of adopting a more longitudinal approach, and one that considers the whole life-course and various stages of widowhood. In this way it became apparent that widowed women were not always negatively affected by widowhood. Furthermore, by considering the ways in which widowhood is not always negative we can understand more about their lives. Organisations conducting research on widowhood should look at, but also look beyond, the issues associated with income, and adopt a well-being approach that considers the multiple things, subjective and objective, needed to live well.

Related to this, stakeholders who provide services should implement programs that support not just income-generation, but that deal with issues like low confidence, depression, stress, illiteracy, sleep deprivation and anxiety. Connected to this, future initiatives to support widowed women should be aware of the often subtle and complex ways in which widows assert agency. They should develop and expand upon the strategies and programmes women themselves use to resist discrimination, therefore supporting them in their own means of empowerment. Related to the forms of discrimination widowed women experience, it is clear that many are comfortable resisting restrictions associated with adornment, but that further relationships and remarrying, and even discussions of such, are still frowned upon. Given this, such organisations should facilitate discussions, and open up a safe dialogue in communities, about remarriage and relationships.

Given the importance of family to widowed women's well-being I recommend that stakeholder organisations develop programs and provide services which encourage and foster relationships between widowed women and their families. They need to work with older widowed women and their adult children, and mediate the gap between parents expectations and their children's capacity to support them. Another recommendation is to develop projects that support older widowed women in retaining their rightful property, and in building resilience within this changing culture. Day care centres, confidence building, adult education classes, support in setting up bank accounts and rights based training can help to ensure they are not dispossessed, and can strengthen their resilience more generally.

Many stakeholders who are interested in supporting marginalised groups like widows will inevitably have a focus on advocacy and lobbying. These stakeholders should continue to take research to supra-international organisations like the United Nations, and reiterate the distinct experience of widows and the problems that they face. They should carry on pressurising the Government and MOWCSW to implement interventions to support widowed women. Directing to this to Nepal's new President, who is herself widowed, may prove to be effective. Networking and communicating with older peoples groups and women's groups will be critical in gaining wider support from the public, and will help to strengthen advocacy campaigns. Of course central to any campaign will be the alliances built with the media. Furthermore, stakeholder organisations should identify and support key people in the community with advocacy training.

Interested stakeholders should continue to expose the patriarchy within the new constitution, and lobby the Government to change it. As mentioned previously, the new constitution restricts single women and women with foreign partners in passing citizenship on to their children. Such discussions related to social change conclude this thesis, and

further illustrate my long-standing ethnographic interest in, and commitment to, Nepali widows.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Table illustrating intersectional and demographic information of participants

No.	Name	Current age/age when widowed	Type of marriage	Caste	Faith	Education level attained	Living situation	Children (gender and age)	Employment	Top three well-being ranking (those marked / are of equal importance)
1	Ambika	34 (25)	Love	Brahman	Hindu	Masters	-lived with son -tenant	1 son	Social worker	Family Basic Needs Confidence
2	Anita	64 (57)	Arranged	Gurung (indigenous)	Buddhist and Hindu	Adult literacy	-lived with sons -privately owned	4 sons (35, 36, 39, 42)	Unemployed	
3	Anna (never married)	34 (NA)	NA	Magar (indigenous)	Hindu	SLC	-lived with sister -privately owned	NA	Unemployed	Confidence Peace Faith
4	Anu	50 (40)	Love	Chhetri	Hindu	Bachelor	-lived alone -privately owned	2 sons	Bank worker	Basic needs Health Confidence
5	Arya	44 (31)	Love	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived with children -tenant	1 daughter, 3 sons	Sex worker	Confidence Family Friends
6	Apsara	Both unknown	Arranged	Chhetri	Hindu	Primary	-lived with son -tenant	1 son (8)	Sex worker	
7	Binita	60 (43)	Arranged -his second marriage	Chhetri	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with daughters-privately owned	2 daughters, 2 sons	Unknown	Confidence Family Peace

8	Birmaya	43 (28)	Love -intercaste	Newar	Hindu	Primary	-lived with children -privately owned	1 daughter (20), 1 son (24)	Shop owner	Education Confidence Family
9	Bishnu Maya	85 (55)	Arranged -his second marriage	Newar	Buddhist	None	-lived alone -privately owned	2 daughters, 3 sons	Unemployed	
10	Chandra Kala	62 (46)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	None	-lived alone -tenant	4 daughters, 2 sons	Unemployed	
11	Chandra Maya	50 (39)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	None	-lived with children -tenant	2 daughters, 3 sons	Unemployed	
12	Chini Maya	63 (47)	Love	Magar (indigenous)	Hindu	None	-lived with son -tenant	2 daughters, 5 sons	Unemployed	
13	Debaki	66 (57)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with sons -privately owned	3 daughters, 2 sons	Unemployed	Health Confidence Money
14	Dhan Jumari	76 (50)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Primary	-lived alone -privately owned	1 daughter, 3 sons	Social worker/ran business	
15	Dhana Maya	50 (44)	Arranged -intercaste	Newar	Buddhist and Hindu	Primary	-lived with daughter -privately owned	1 daughter (24)	Community health worker	Confidence Education Family

8	Birmaya	43 (28)	Love -intercaste	Newar	Hindu	Primary	-lived with children -privately owned	1 daughter (20), 1 son (24)	Shop owner	Education Confidence Family
9	Bishnu Maya	85 (55)	Arranged -his second marriage	Newar	Buddhist	None	-lived alone -privately owned	2 daughters, 3 sons	Unemployed	
10	Chandra Kala	62 (46)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	None	-lived alone -tenant	4 daughters, 2 sons	Unemployed	
11	Chandra Maya	50 (39)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	None	-lived with children -tenant	2 daughters, 3 sons	Unemployed	
12	Chini Maya	63 (47)	Love	Magar (indigenous)	Hindu	None	-lived with son -tenant	2 daughters, 5 sons	Unemployed	
13	Debaki	66 (57)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with sons -privately owned	3 daughters, 2 sons	Unemployed	Health Confidence Money
14	Dhan Jumari	76 (50)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Primary	-lived alone -privately owned	1 daughter, 3 sons	Social worker/ran business	
15	Dhana Maya	50 (44)	Arranged -intercaste	Newar	Buddhist and Hindu	Primary	-lived with daughter -privately owned	1 daughter (24)	Community health worker	Confidence Education Family

16	Durga	74 (54)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Primary	-lived with son -privately owned	2 daughters (36, 39), 1 son (35)	Unemployed	
17	Ganga Maya	70 (66)	Arranged	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived alone -tenant	2 daughters, 1 son	Unemployed	
18	Goma	40 (39)	Love	Newar	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with in laws -privately owned	1 daughter (17), 1 son (18)	Unemployed	Health Peace Love
19	Gyani	46 (45)	Love	Newar	Hindu	Adult literacy	-lived with in-laws -privately owned	1 daughter (25), 1 son (30)	Unemployed	Confidence Faith Family
20	Indira	55 (37)	Love	Newar	Hindu	Adult literacy	-lived with sons -tenant	2 daughters (24,26), 2 sons (32, 34)	Domestic cleaner	Employment Family Communication
21	Indra	55 (45)	Love	Newar	Hindu and Buddhist	SLC	-lived with children -privately owned	1 daughter (32), 1 son (35)	Unemployed	Confidence Education Employment
22	Indu	38 (31)	Arranged -his second marriage	Brahman	Hindu	Adult literacy	-lived with children -privately owned	1 daughter (19), 2 sons (15, 18)	Shop owner and tailor	Confidence Trust Money
23	Iswari	26 (22)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with in-laws -unknown	1 daughter (9)	Worked in pharmaceutical factory	Basic needs love Peace

24	Jaya Kali	28 (26)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with children -privately owned	2 daughters (8, 10), 1 son (5)	Worked at a co-operative	Family Faith Education
25	Jogmaya	40 (39)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Primary	-lived with daughter -privately owned	2 daughters (17, 20)	Worked at a co-operative	Money Basic needs Family
26	Juna	60 (40)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	None	-lived with daughter -unknown	1 daughter (30), 2 sons (28, 31)	Unemployed	Basic needs Faith Health
27	Jyoti	36 (35)	Love -intercaste	Bhujel (indigenous)	Hindu	Bachelors	-lived with mother, daughter -tenant	1 daughter (5)	Event organiser	Confidence Money Education
28	Kabina	32 (29)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with in-laws -privately owned	1 daughter (8), 1 son (5)	Hostel manager	Health Education Confidence
29	Kaili	27 (27)	Arranged	Chhetri	Hindu	Bachelors	-lived with in-laws -privately owned	1 daughter (5)	Student	Education Family Employment
30	Kamala	56 (47)	Arranged	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived with daughter in-law -privately owned	2 sons (23, 34)	Unemployed	Education House Friends
31	Kamana	48 (46)	Arranged	Newar	Christian	SLC	-lived with daughters -privately owned	2 daughters (17, 20)	Worked in micro-credit organisation	Confidence Faith Family

32	Kanchi	24 (23)	Love -intercaste (both his and her second marriage)	Nepali ('lower' caste)	Christian	None	-lived in orphanage with daughter and other children	1 daughter (3)	Cleaner in orphanage	Education Health Confidence
33	Keshari	35 (25)	Love -intercaste	Chhetri	Christian	SLC	-lived with daughter, mother, brothers wife -privately owned	1 daughter (10)	Librarian	
34	Kishun	46 (43)	Love	Newar	Christian	Primary	-lived alone -tenant	1 daughter (25), 1 son (30)	Had a tea shop	Money Love Confidence
35	Komal (separated)	28 (NA)	Arranged	Kolange ('lower' caste)	Christian	Primary	-lived with siblings -unknown	1 daughter (11), 1 son (8)	Worked in shoe factory	Faith Basic needs Employment
36	Lakshmi (separated)	24 (NA)	Love -intercaste	Rijan/ Purkuti ('lower' caste)	Christian	Primary	-lived in bible school	1 son (8)	Cooked and cleaned in bible school	
37	Laxmi	59 (47)	Arranged	Newar	Christian	Basic	-lived with sons -unknown	2 daughters, 1 son (all over 25)	Helped cousin in tea shop	
38	Lila	58 (50)	Arranged	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived with sons -tenant	2 sons (35, 38)	Had a shop	Basic needs Love Education
39	Lily	69 (55)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Basic	-lived with son -privately owned	2 sons (51, other unknown)	Unemployed	

40	Lokendra	61 (21)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	None	-lived with daughter -privately owned	1 daughter (40)	Unemployed	Family Faith
41	Maiya	50 (28)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	None	-lived with daughter in law -tenant	4 daughters, 1 son	Unemployed	Money Family Basic needs
42	Mana	48 (24)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Basic	-lived with daughter -privately owned	4 daughters (27, 29, 31, 33)	Worked in field	
43	Mana Kali	61 (44)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	None	-lived with 2 daughters and 1 son -unknown	6 children	Worked in field	
44	Maya	69 (55)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	None	-lived with sons -privately owned	4 daughters, 2 sons	Worked in shop	
45	Meera	36 (25)	Arranged	Damai ('lower' caste)	Hindu	Basic	-lived with children -privately owned	3 children (13, 16, 17)	Worked in field	Health Confidence Education

46	Meiti	45 (35)	Arranged	Damai ('lower' caste)	Hindu	Basic	-lived with son -unknown	1 daughter (24), 1 son (22)	Worked in field	
47	Mina	36 (30)	Love	Newar	Hindu/ Buddhist	Masters	-lived with son -privately owned	1 son (14)	Teacher	Money Education Health
48	Monmaya	51 (33)	Arranged	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived with sons -privately owned	2 sons	Worked in floriculture office	Confidence Money House
49	Nanda	56 (52)	Love and arranged	Newar	Hindu	Adult literacy	-lived with son -privately owned	5 daughters, 1 son (oldest 40)	Unemployed	Faith Money Confidence
50	Narayan Tara	59 (34)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Adult literacy	-lived with son -unknown	1 daughter, (39), 1 son (36)	Worked in field	Money Family Love
51	Narbada	28 (24)	Love	Newar	Hindu	Bachelor	-lived with in-laws -privately owned	1 daughter (5)	Had a hardware shop and was district officer for WHR	Confidence Money Family
52	Neeru	43 (40)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	None	-lived with children -privately owned	2 daughter (16, 18), 1 son (23)	Domestic help during festivals	Confidence House /basic needs Family
53	Nirmala	57 (53)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with son -privately owned	1 daughter (35), 1 son (29)	Worked in bank	Confidence Education Health

54	Pragya	50 (44)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Adult literacy	-lived with son -privately owned	1 daughter (33), 1 son (30)	Unemployed	Rights Money Friends
55	Prapti	50 (43)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Adult literacy	-lived with sons -privately owned	2 sons (both above 30)	Worked in field	Health Family Money
56	Prashamsa	60 (56)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Adult literacy	-lived alone -privately owned	1 daughter, 3 sons (all above 30)	Worked in field	Confidence Faith Money
57	Pramila	55 (45)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	None	-lived with youngest son -privately owned	1 daughter (29), 2 sons (30, 39)	Worked in field	Money Love Education
58	Puja	50 (30)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu/ Buddhist	Adult literacy	-lived with son, -privately owned	1 daughter (29), 1 son (30)	Worked in field	Family Love
59	Putali	43 (40)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with mother-in-law and children -unknown	2 daughters (17, 22), 1 son (11)	Worked in bookshop	Health Faith Family
60	Ratna Sunar	49 (45)	Love	Brahman	Hindu	None	-lived with son -privately owned	1 daughter (28), 2 sons (24, 26)	Unemployed	
61	Rekha	45 (41)	Both second marriage -(arranged)	Pudasaini -('lower' caste)	Hindu	None	-lived with daughters -squatting	3 daughters (12, 14, 16)	Reared cows and begged	
62	Rina	21 (19)	Love and arranged	Bika ('lower' caste)	Christian	Secondary	-lived with in-laws -tenant	2 sons (3, 4)	Knits and sells	Confidence Employment Love
63	Romita	60 (48)	Arranged	Sunuwar ('lower' caste)	Christian	None	-lived with son -privately owned	1 daughter (40), 1 son (34)	Unemployed	Faith Family Employment

64	Rudru Maya	32 (26)	Arranged	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived with in-laws -privately owned	2 daughters (10, 14)	Had a poultry shop	
65	Sabita	50 (25)	Arranged	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived with children -privately owned	1 daughter (28), 1 son (30),	Worked with marble	Independence
66	Saili	80 (73)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	None	-lived alone -privately owned	3 daughters, 5 sons	Unemployed	
67	Sajita	66 (20)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	None	-lived with brothers family -unknown	No children	Unemployed	Faith Education
68	Samayara	24 (19)	Arranged -inter caste	Brahman	Hindu	Basic	-lived alone (sons in hostel) -tenant	3 sons (8, twins 10)	Circus artist	
69	Santu Kumari	50 (41)	Arranged (his second marriage)	Achami ('lower' caste)	Hindu	None	-lived with son and youngest daughter -privately owned	4 daughters, 1 son (all over 20)	Unemployed	
70	Sanu	56 (16)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu and Buddhist	Adult literacy	-lived with sons -privately owned	2 sons (35, 37)	Worked in field	
71	Saraswati	44 (34)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	None	-lived with daughter, Uncle, son, brother -privately owned	4 daughters (youngest daughter 16), 1 son (22)	Worked in field	Family/basic needs Peace

72	Seti	40 (17)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	None	-lived with maiti -privately owned	No children	Unemployed	
73	Shanti	33 (24)	Love	Newar	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with son -privately owned	1 son (14)	Housekeeper in hospital	Basic needs Family
74	Sharda	45 (24)	Arranged -intercaste (his second marriage)	Newar	Hindu	Basic	-lived with son-tenant	1 son (25)	Had a stall selling souvenirs	House Family
75	Shasi	48 (47)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with sons -privately owned	2 sons (23, 24)	Unemployed	Family
76	Shova	50 (48)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	Unknown	-lived with sons -unknown	2 sons (27, 30)	Worked in field	Family Money
77	Shreya	50 (37)	Arranged -his second marriage	Pariyar ('lower' caste)	No faith	None	-lived with daughter -privately owned	1 daughter (15), 1 son (35)	Worked in field	
78	Shyam	67 (64)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	None	-lived with son -privately owned	4 daughters, 1 son (50)	Worked in field/ construction labourer	Basic needs Independence
79	Sita	64 (58)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	None	-lived with son -privately owned	1 son (45)	Worked in field/construction labourer	Basic needs peace
80	Srijana	40 (27)	Arranged	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived with daughter, daughter in-law -privately owned	1 daughter (22), 1 son (24)	Shop owner (tea and snacks shop)	Family Money Love

81	Subhadra	50 (25)	Arranged-his second marriage	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived with sons -privately owned	2 sons (27, 28)	Unemployed	Independence Peace Family
82	Sukhi	69 (unknown)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Primary	-lived with daughter -privately owned	1 daughter (48)	Unemployed	
83	Sunita	34 (24)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Primary	-lived in maternal home -privately owned	1 daughter (10)	Tailor	Family Peace
84	Susheel	48 (42)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Secondary	-lived with children -tenant	2 sons (22, 27)	Unemployed	Family Peace
85	Sushma	38 (33)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Unknown	-lived with brother-in law, sons -privately owned	1 daughter (20), 2 sons (7, 12)	Shop owner	Family Basic Needs
86	Tara Devi	54 (46)	Love	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived with cousin, 3 sons -tenant	3 sons	Unemployed	Family House Money
87	Thaukura (separated)	61 (NA)	Arranged	Chhetri	Hindu	None	-lived with son -squatting	2 daughters, 2 sons	Unemployed	Love Family Friends
88	Tulasha (husband missing)	46 (39)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu and Christian	Primary	-lived with children -squatting	1 daughter (20), 1 son (18)	Social worker	Education Employment Money
89	Urmila	66 (62)	Arranged	Brahman	Hindu	None	-lived with youngest son -squatting	1 daughter (36), 2 sons (41, 47)	Unemployed	Health Peace House/family

90	Usha	45 (21)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Adult literacy	-lived with maternal family -privately owned	1 son (25)	Makes mud heaters	Family
91	Yashoda	40 (33)	Arranged	Newar	Hindu	Primary	-lived with children -privately owned	1 daughter (17), 1 son (19)	Shop owner	Family Peace

Appendix 2: Table illustrating previous research and methods adopted

Please note particular reference has been made to those that are closely, conceptually and geographically, linked with this work.

Author(s) and Date	**Research subject**	**Where**	**Methods (type and number)**
Chen M and Dreze J (1992)	Widows and Health in Rural North India	India-villages situated in West Bengal, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh	*intensive fieldwork survey (262)
Datta A (2008)	Spatial agency in widow colony	India - Delhi	*semi-structured interviewing (18) *architectural mapping
Drèze J and Srinivasan P (1995)	Widowhood and poverty in rural India	Rural India	*quantitative statistics taken from the national consumer survey data between 1986-1987
Galvin K (2005)	Widowhood in urban Nepal	Nepal - Kathmandu	*semi-structured interviews (50) *life histories (20)
Haviland M, Shrestha A, Decker M, Kohrt B, Kafle H, Lohani S, Thapa L and Surkan P (2014)	Barriers to sexual and reproductive health care among widows	Nepal - Chitwan, Kathmandu, Kavre	*in-depth interviews (21) *focus groups (6)
Korang-Okrah R and Haight W(2014)	Widowhood and property rights	Ghana - Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo regions	*ethnography (4 months) *in-depth interviews (20)
Lamb S (2000)	Ageing, Gender and embodiment in North India	India - Bengal	*ethnography (one year) *repeated interviews and histories with widowed women in village
Lamb S (2013)	In/Dependence, Intergenerational Uncertainty and the Ambivalent State: Perceptions of Old Age Security in India	India - Kolkata	*ethnography in old age homes *interviews with elderly people, their families and community members

Lee S (2005)	The Effects of War on Rural Cambodian Widows	Rural Cambodia	*semi-structured interviews (26)
Lenette C (2014)	Refugee and widow mothers in Australia	Brisbane, Australia	*ethnography (8) *in-depth interviews (8) *visual ethnography (photo elicitation and digital storytelling) (8)
Mohindra K, Haddad S and Narayana D	Debt and survival of widows in rural Kerala, India'	India - Rural Kerala	*key informant interviews (7) *semi-structured interviews (10)
Ramnarain S (2014, 2016)	Widowhood in post conflict Nepal	Nepal - Kathmandu Valley, Rolpa and Dang (2008) Morang, Sunsari Dhading, Tanahu, and Chitwan (2011)	*interviews (25) collected in 2008-2009 *interviews (7) in 2011 *FDG (6) in 2011
Sabri B, Sabarwal S, Decker M, Shrestha A, Sharma K, Thapa L and Surkan P (2015)	Violence Against Widows in Nepal: Experiences, Coping Behaviors, and Barriers in Seeking Help	Nepal - Kathmandu valley, Surkhet, Chitwan, and Kavre districts	*interviews (27)
Sossou M, 2002	Widowhood practices in West Africa; The silent victims	Ghana, Ivory Coast and Nigeria	*secondary analysis of previous literature
Thomas F, 2008	Remarriage after spousal death: options facing widows and implications for livelihood security	Namibia	*focus groups (7) *surveys (100) *semi structured interviews (16)
Yadav P, 2016	White Sari – Transforming Widowhood in Nepal	Nepal	*in-depth interviews (17) *focus group (1) *key informant interviews (5)

Appendix 3: Interview schedule 1

Well-being amongst Nepali Widows (simplified title)

Semi-structured interview guide

Date of interview:

Location of interview:

Interview number:

Introduction

-introduce myself, the purpose of research

-details about the interview itself- duration, pausing, topics of discussion, recording

-details about anonymity and confidentiality

Section 1: Intersectional widowhood

***Demographic questions- tell me about yourself**

Prompts

-Age, age when widowed caste?

-Where do you live? Maiti?

-Who do you live with? (Parents, in-laws, alone, children, other family, non-family (e.g. friend), renting from landlord/owned property?

-How is your relationship with your in-laws?

-Do you have any children? Boys/girls and ages?

-Where do you work? Where have you worked in your life?

-Religion?

-Educational level?

-Living situation- renting or privately owned?

-Are you a member of any organisations?

***Tell me about your married life**

Prompts

-When did you get married? How old were you?

-Who did you marry? What job did your husband do?

-How soon after your marriage were your children born?

-Where did you live? Who did you live with (household composition)?

-Was it an arranged or 'love' marriage?

-Did you have a happy marriage?

-What was his personality like?

-How did you divide the household responsibilities?

***Tell me about the period when you were immediately widowed**

Prompts

-How did your husband die?

-How old was he when he died?

-How did you find out about his death?

-How did you cope in the immediate days following his death?

-Were you involved in arranging for his funeral?

Do you think that different women have different experiences of widowhood?

Why do you think this is?

***Tell me how you think age influences the experience of widowhood?**

Prompts

-How is it different for older, middle aged and younger widows? (ask appropriate question in relation to age of participant)

-At what ages has it been most difficult for you? (question depended upon how long participant has been widowed)

-How does your widowhood make you feel about your age?

-Do you feel older or younger as a consequence of your widowed status?

***Tell me how you think caste influences the experience of widowhood?**

Prompts

-What castes are your friends?

-What castes are those within your neighbouring community?

-Do you feel caste affects the experience of widowhood? How and why?

***Tell me how you think religion influences the experience of widowhood?**

Prompts

-Do you think religion affects the experience of widowhood? Restrictions in different religions?

-Has your experience of religion changed upon widowhood? How? More/less religious?

-Converted religion?

***Tell me how you think education influences the experience of widowhood?**

Prompts

-ask about their education

-How has your education influenced your experience of widowhood?

-Tell me how does education generally speaking influence the experience of widowhood?

***Tell me how you think family (in-laws) influence the experiences of widowhood?**

Prompts

-How did your husband's family (mother, father, siblings, and extended family) -react to you after the news of his death? What is your relationship like with them?

-Did you feel as if they blamed you for his death? How has your relationship with your in-laws changed/ or not?

-Did they expect you to continue to live with them (if they were living in extended family) or to go and live with your own family?

-What expectations did you feel you needed to fulfil?
-Did they expect you to start working to compensate for your husband's lost earnings?
-How did they support you or not?
-Do you feel the attitude of a widow's in-laws can influence her experience of widowhood?
-What about your maiti? How did they help? Support you financially/ by other means?

***Tell me how you think children influence the experiences of widowhood?**
Prompts
-How do you cope with looking after your children and being a single parent?
-How do you feel decisions concerning your children's lives have changed upon widowhood?

***Tell me how you think being employed influences the experiences of widowhood?**
-Tell me about your job?
-Do you have additional sources of income? If yes, what are these? (E.g. children working, husbands pension, loan, renting a room)
-If no, have you worked in the past? What was your job?

***Tell me how the geographical area a woman lives in influences the experiences of widowhood?**

<u>Section 2: Well-being</u>
-Can you tell me what you understand by the term well-being (good life)?
-What things do you need to live well? Name three things you need to live well.
Then show them the list below and rank them. Add others if they have thought of anything else

Money
Faith/religion
Friends
Confidence
Family
Education
Health
Housing
Skills
Your rights
Love
Food, water, clothing (basic needs)
Peace/security
Communication
A voice
Other (please specify)

-Why did you particularly select these issues/things? Why did you rank them as you did?

-Has this understanding of well-being changed upon widowhood? If so why? How?

-What has been the biggest change in your well-being upon widowhood?

-How have you coped with these changes?

-What did you do in order to increase/maintain your well-being?

Section 3: Agency

-Tell me about the different choices you've made as a widow? How have the choices you have made changed?

-Who has power within the household?

-Would you like to change anything in your life? How would you change it?

-From 1 to 10 how much control do you feel you have over your own life/your children's lives?
-In which areas of your life do you feel you have control? Give following prompts if needed (Within your family, neighbouring community, at work, within your friendship group, within organisations you are involved in, within the local Government, within your local religious centre, online, within the media/arts, in public, with other single women (widows), within groups of same ethnicity/caste)
-Tell me more about how you have asserted control in these areas? What do you feel is preventing you from asserting control in these other areas?

Photograph and final question

If you could give a name (other than your own) to yourself what would you refer to yourself as? Give examples if needed…aama, wife, independent women, job, Hindu

<u>Conclusion/Thank you</u>

*Is there anything you want to ask/add?
*Is there anything you would like me to clarify?
*Have you got any feedback for me?
*Give them thanks for their participation
*Let them know how to contact me
*Give them the names and numbers of NGO's who could help them

Appendix 4: Interview schedule 2

Well-being amongst Nepali Widows (simplified title)

Semi-structured interview guide

Date of interview:

Location of interview:

Interview number:

Introduction

-introduce myself, the purpose of research

-details about the interview itself- duration, pausing, topics of discussion, recording

-details about anonymity and confidentiality

Section 1: Intersectional Widowhood

***Demographic questions- tell me about yourself**

Prompts

-Age, age when widowed caste?

-Where do you live? Maiti?

-Who do you live with? (Parents, in-laws, alone, children, other family, non-family (e.g. friend), renting from landlord/owned property?

-How is your relationship with your in-laws?

-Do you have any children? Boys/girls and ages?

-Where do you work? Where have you worked in your life?

-Religion?

-Educational level?

-Living situation- renting or privately owned?

-Are you a member of any organisations?

***Tell me about your married life**

Prompts

-When did you get married? How old were you?

-Who did you marry? What job did your husband do?

-How soon after your marriage were your children born?

-Where did you live? Who did you live with (household composition)?

-Was it an arranged or 'love' marriage?

-Did you have a happy marriage?

-What was his personality like?

-How did you divide the household responsibilities?

***Tell me about the period when you were immediately widowed**

Prompts

-How did your husband die?

-How old was he when he died?

-How did you find out about his death?

-How did you cope in the immediate days following his death?

-Were you involved in arranging for his funeral?

Do you think that different women have different experiences of widowhood?

Why do you think this is?

Ageing

What does your widowed status make you feel about your age?

Prompts and additional questions depending on answers

-Sometimes people associate widowhood with older women. How does your widowhood make you feel about your age?

-Has it made you feel older or younger or the same?

-If older or younger why/how so?

-Do you feel the same age as married women who are a similar age to you? Take for example a married women in the community who is the same age is you, do you feel older/younger/just the same as her? Why?

-Has your responsibility has increased upon your widowhood?

-Does that make you feel older or younger?

-Do you think Nepali women have more respected as they get older?
-Are widows more respected as they get older?
-Socially speaking what can older people do that younger people can't and what can younger people do that older people can't?
-Do you think you will act any differently when you are older?
-How do you feel the way you act now will affect the respect you receive/the way you will act when you are older?

<u>Section 2: Well-being</u>

Can you tell me what you understand by the term well-being (good life)?

What things do you need to live well? Name three things you need to live well.

How has your understanding of well-being changes upon widowhood?

***Self-confidence**

-What does self-confidence mean to you?
-What is a person who has self-confidence like?
-When/where do you feel you have self-confidence?
-At what points of your life have you had good self-confidence/at points have you had low self-confidence?
-How do you increase your self-confidence?

***Independence**

-What do you understand by independence?
-Do you feel it is the same or different to self-confidence?
-What is an independent person like?
-When/where do you feel you have independence?
-At what points of your life have you had independence?
-Why is it good to be independent?
-Can independence be a bad thing?
-Who do you ask for help?
-Who do you not like asking for help?

-Many women have told me they hope they do not have to ask anyone for anything? Do you agree? Why do you think this is?
-What 'things' do you hope you do not have to ask people for?

***Altruism**

-Many women have told me "a good life is one where my children are happy and healthy". Women often very selfless in terms of their children and with other people.
-Why do you think this is?

Use these prompts if needed

Do you feel it is….
1. Due to Nepali culture and society, male dominated society,… there is a certain pressure for women to be selfless? Do you feel this pressure?
2. Because is it in a woman's blood/part of being a woman
3. That one day your children will support you in the same way
4. Do you think that doing good for other people will bring you some good fortune or good karma in the future?

If this because you hope that your children will look after you one day what are your expectations from them?

<u>Section 3: Agency</u>

***Gendered cultural practices and agency**

-What are the expectations are but upon women within Nepali culture?
-What things can men do that women can't and vice versa?
-What are the cultural practices related to widowhood?
-What are the things you can and can't do as a widowed woman?
-At this moment in time for you what is good/bad about being a widow/woman in Nepal?
-Do you/did you engage/conform to practices expected of widows? Why did you do so?

Use these prompts if necessary

Is it for…

-people to respect you

-for god

-for karma

-for your husband

-to fit into society

-because you like them

-because you want them to continue as they have been in our culture for such a long time?

-Do you see these rituals and expectations of widows as being a good or bad thing?

-Why do women perform these practices even though many people see them as being discriminatory?

-What would happen if you didn't follow them?

-Who is it that enforces them?

-Have you ever wanted to change discriminatory practices?

-If so why?

***Individual interpretation of agency and practices**

-What cultural, religious and social practices do you get involved with? Which ones do you reject? How have you rejected them?

-Do you have your own take on Nepali customs and practices?

***Fate and karma**

-What do you understand by fate and karma?

-Do you relate to fate and karma within your daily life?

-Do you explain things that -happen in your life through fate and karma?

-Do you think your widowhood is a result of your fate/karma?

-Do you think the things you do in this life will affect your next life/the rest of this life?

-Do you think your fate stops you from 'doing things' since your life may already be determined for you regardless of what you do/actions you take?
-Do you think the idea of karma encourages/discourages you to act in certain ways as it may affect the rest of this life and maybe the next life?
-Can you influence your own karma/fate?

Photograph and final question

If you could give a name (other than your own) to yourself what would you refer to yourself as? Give examples/prompts if needed…aama, grand mother, wife, independent women, job, change maker, daughter of someone, Hindu, Christian.

Conclusion/Thank you

*Is there anything you want to ask/add?
*Is there anything you would like me to clarify?
*Have you got any feedback for me?
*Give them thanks for their participation
*Let them know how to contact me
*Give them the names and numbers of NGO's who could help them

Appendix 5: Oral history schedule

Well-being amongst Nepali Widows (simplified title)

Oral history guide

Date of oral history interview:

Location of oral history interview:

Participant number (if already interviewed previously)

Oral history number:

Introduction

-who am I, the purpose of research

-details about the history itself- duration, pausing, recording and graph[82]

-details about anonymity and confidentiality

***Demographic questions- tell me about yourself**

Prompts

-Age, age when widowed caste?

-Where do you live? Maiti?

-Who do you live with? (Parents, in-laws, alone, children, other family, non-family (e.g. friend), renting from landlord/owned property?

-How is your relationship with your in-laws?

-Do you have any children? Boys/girls and ages?

-Where do you work?

-Religion?

-Educational level?

[82] As I go through the oral history I will also ask participants to tell me about their well-being at various points in their life. I will do this in the form of a simple graph, where well-being will be on y-axis and time on the x-axis. Participants will be given the opportunity to review this at the end and change it if they want to.

-Living situation- renting or privately owned?

-Are you a member of any organisations?

Section 1

Tell me about your family and growing up

Prompts

-Where and when were you born?

-Memories of family life

-Parents- where are they from, what did they do?

-Brothers and sisters- how you got on, what has happened to them now?

-Everyday life in childhood- describe housework, the house, garden, food and meal times

-Celebrations/festivals/holidays- religious and cultural

-Describe your neighbourhood and community

-School/Education- influences and friendships

-Relationships- family, friends etc

-Free time- children's games and leisure

-What's your fondest memories of childhood?/What were the more difficult times of your childhood?

Section 2

Tell me about your early adulthood/working life (may not be applicable if participant has not worked)

Prompts

-Describe your life as a young adult? What were you doing? Where were you living?

-How were your relationships with your family?

-What were your interests?

-What jobs have you had?

-Describe the workplaces

-What involved a typical working day?

-Influences at work

-Feelings towards work- happiness, fulfilment, socialising, friends,

support training etc

-Memories of work- fondest memory at work and most difficult times/memories at work

Section 3

Tell me about your marriage and your husband

Prompts

-When did you marry?

-What did your husband do?

-Where did you live upon marriage?

-Who was living in the household?

-What was it like living there?

-What was it like to move into the *ghar*?

-Setting up of the household- dividing money, property ownership etc?

-Describe children, childcare, parenting, affection, discipline and ambitions for children

-Describe the house, garden, food, meal times and living arrangements

-Daily housework-how was this divided?

-Balance of domestic work and work outside the home

-Describe your neighbourhood and community

-What did you do in your free time?

-Celebrations/festivals- religious and cultural

-Friends and relationships

-Memories of being married-love, companionship, romance, partnership, happiness or unhappiness in married life

Section 4

Tell me about your widowhood

Prompts

-Describe the immediate days/weeks after your husband passed away?

-How did people support you? How have you coped?

-Describe children, childcare, parenting, affection, discipline and ambitions for children

-Describe the house, garden, food, meal times and living arrangements

-Daily housework-how was this divided?

-Balance of domestic work and work outside the home

-Describe your neighbourhood and community

-Free time

-Celebrations/festivals/holidays- religious and cultural

-Friends and relationships

Section 5

Tell me about your expectations for the future

Prompts

-Is this life one you expected?

-What do you hope for the future?

-What do you hope for for your children's future?

Activity: go over the well-being graph with the participant

Photograph

Conclusion/Thank you

*Is there anything you want to ask/add?

*Is there anything you would like me to clarify?

*Have you got any feedback for me?

*Give them thanks for their participation

*Let them know how to contact me

*Give them the names and numbers of NGO's who could help them

Appendix 6: Focus group schedule

Well-being amongst Nepali Widows (simplified title)

Focus Group Guide

Date of focus group:

Organiser of focus group:

Location of focus group:

Focus group number:

Number of participants:

Introduction

-introduce myself, the purpose of research

-details about the focus group itself- duration, pausing, topics of discussion, recording

-details about anonymity and confidentiality

Discussion Topic Areas

-Tell me what life is like being widowed?

-How is widowhood different for different women?

-What difficulties do you face as widowed women?

-What do you consider to be a 'good life'?

Exercises

-Well-being ranking- here I will get participants to put pictures illustrating dimensions of well-being in order from the most to least important. I will then get them to do this again related to what they felt before widowhood.

-Problem tree- get participants to discuss issues associated with widowhood and the root causes of theses issues. The roots causes will be drawn at the roots of the tree and the consequent issues will be at

the branches.

-Solution chart – here I will put down some of these issues on a chart, next to them I will ask participants what are the shorter term and longer term solutions and where they can get help

-Mapping- here I will get participants to draw a map of the community illustrating the places where they feel safe and happy and those where they don't

-Drawing – if participants want they can draw pictures of what makes them happy

Photograph of those participating in focus group

<u>Conclusion/Thank you</u>

*Is there anything you want to ask/add?

*Is there anything you would like me to clarify?

*Have you got any feedback for me?

*Give them thanks for their participation

*Let them know how to contact me

*Give them the names and numbers of NGO's who could help them

Appendix 7: Key informant interview schedule example HelpAge

Well-being amongst Nepali Widows (simplified title)

Semi-structured interview guide

Date of interview:

Location of interview:

Key informant interview number:

Introduction

-introduce myself, the purpose of research

-details about the interview itself- duration, pausing, topics of discussion, recording

-details about anonymity and confidentiality

HelpAge

-start off by telling me a little about yourself and your background?

-Please can you describe your role within HelpAge?

-What programmes are you involved with? What age are those who use your services?

-Does HelpAge target men and women equally?

-What are some of HelpAge's initiatives related to older women?

-Who does HelpAge see to be most vulnerable women?

-What do you think the main challenges are for older women?

-How does HelpAge target these women?

-How do you differentiate between different women? Accounting for different women's needs?

-How does HelpAge work with local based women's NGO's?

-How does HelpAge gather data to inform its policies?

HelpAge and widowhood

-What services/assistance/facilities/activities do you offer widows? Do you have any support specifically for widows?
-What about widowers?

Widowhood

-What do you think widows need to live well?
-What do you feel are the most important factors influencing a widow's well-being? What is holding them back?
-In what ways do you think widows are empowered? Have you seen evidence of widows being empowered?
-Where, when and in what respects are widowed women empowered?
-How do you think they are perceived by society? Respected?
-What do you think could be done to confront these challenges?
-How do their problems differ from those of widowers?

Gendered cultural practices

-What cultural practices do you feel are most discriminatory towards Nepali women?
-What is being done/can be done to stop these?
-How are women themselves trying to stop these?
-What are the main expectations of widowed women?
-What are the main restrictions associated with widowhood?
-Why do women perform these practices even though many see them as being discriminatory?
-What would happen if they didn't follow these cultural practices?
-Who is it that enforces these traditions?
-Have you seen widowed women resisting these practices?

Government and the state

-How do widows engage within the state, civil society organizations and society at large? Do you think older widows/women are involved within these spheres? If so how? If not how are they being excluded from these spheres?
-What is being done/not being done by organizations and the Government to improve the lives of widows?

-What social security is there for older people apart from the pension?

-How much does the pension help?

-Does HelpAge inform any of the Governments policies on widowhood/older women?

-What sorts of programs do you think need to be put in place/supported in relation to widows?

-What else needs to be done by the Gov? NGO's?

Appendix 8: Interview transcription example

Interview number:

Date:

Who was taking it:

Where:

Length of recording:

I (interviewee): So I need to say my age by year?

A (use your initial): Yes.

I: 2032 B.S. *Jestha* 4th

A: hmm...so that would make you how old??

S (Suzy): You want me to write that down?

(I, S and A trying to figure it out)[83]

I: I am telling you the right age alright?? I don't lie about such things...*(laughing)*

A: Of course you wouldn't

(A and S working it out)

A: Okay so she is 38... So who all live in your family right now?

I: 2 sons and a daughter

S: How old are your sons?[84]

I: The eldest son is 18 years old, the youngest son is 15 and my daughter is 19.

A: She is the eldest *(referring to daughter in the room)*

I: Yes she is the older by a year.

S: Where is your maiti?

I: hmm *(pause*)[85]...my maiti. Do I have to tell where I was born?

A: Yes

I: I was born in Sindhupalchowk, Melamchi.

A: It's two three districts away from Kathmandu and that's the river which they plan to bring to Kathmandu.

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[83] If the conversation is not directly related you can right something like this to indicate what the discussion was about but there is not need to write it out in full

[84] I may have asked here "Arya can you ask the age of *I's* sons?". But you can write it if I was asking the interviewee directly. Only indicate when the question in English has a slightly different meaning when translated.

[85] Please indicate for example pauses, breaks in speech, lowering of voice laughter, or any other outward emotion you can hear.

S: So few hours on the bus?
I: On the bus it will take like 7-8 hours from here.
A: So do your parents still live there?
I: They live in Kapan nowadays.
A: So there is no one in Melamchi now?
I: No. But my father has passed away. Now I have my mother, brother, sister-in-law and my nephew.
A: They have moved to Kathmandu.
S: How did you move to Kathmandu from there?
I: I got married from there as in my husband's family is also from there. It was an arranged marriage. We have known them from before. I got married here in Kathmandu.
A: How long has it been since you came to Kathmandu?
I: I was born there and moved to Kathmandu when I was 5 years old, we moved to Kapan.
S: Oh really? And is that where she met her husband?
I: It was an arranged marriage and his brother had asked for my hand for marriage for his brother. Also it was his second marriage, I am the second wife.
S: Is the first wife still around?
I: She is in Biratnagar (Eastern Nepal). I met her after my husband passed away.
A: Can I ask her if she knew about him being already married?
S: Yes of course.
I: My parents knew. It wasn't a love marriage and I wasn't aware of it. They asked for my hand in marriage and my parents agreed. I saw him on the day of the marriage. By relation I had to call him grandfather.
(A and S express how they are very surprised)
A: Why did your parents agree then?
I: You know people didn't know much back then they were very innocent (*sojho*). Also you had to give quite large dowry when you get married. So they had said that as this would be his second marriage, we wouldn't have to give any dowry. They had told us their weaknesses.
A: Why did he want to get married for the second time?

I: I don't know *(starts crying) (pause waiting for participant to continue)*…it was so hard for me to marry him

Son comes into room

Appendix 9: Information sheet for interviews

Information sheet

Well-being amongst Nepali Widows (simplified title)

(This was read out to all participants before participating)

Name: Suzy Solley
Moblie: 9803711461
Email: s.solley@qmul.ac.uk

I would like to invite you to be part of this research about the experience of widowhood in the Kathmandu Valley. You should only agree to take part if you want to; please note participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to take part there will not be any disadvantages for you and you will hear no more about it.

Please listen to the following information carefully before you decide to take part; I will tell you why I am undertaking this research and what you will be asked to do if you take part. Please ask if anything is unclear or if you would like more information. If you decide to take part you will be asked to verbally confirm on the voice recorder that you agree. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Why am I undertaking this project?

I am a student studying at Queen Mary University in London. I have undertaken research on widows in Nepal previously and I am concerned about the difficulties and problems that Nepalese widows and women face. So, I have come to Nepal to carry out research on the

well-being of Nepalese widows. There is little research on the situation of widows in Nepal, which is why I am undertaking this research. I also hope that the research generated will help towards improving the lives of widowed women.

What does participating involve?

I will need about an hour and a half of your time for this interview. The interview will be an informal conversation about your life as a widow in Nepal. There will be questions related to the issues you face as a widowed women, your opinions on the restrictions and what a 'good life' means to you. You will not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. After the interview, with your permission, I would like to take some photographs. We can conduct the interview anywhere that is comfortable for you and at a time convenient for you.

I will, with your permission, record this interview, so that I can transcribe the conversation we had after. This recording will be detailed once I have transcribed the interview. If you choose to participate, your views and opinions will be kept completely anonymous and no one will be able to identify that you took part in this research. The only people who will be able to view these are my interpreter, my supervisors and my PhD examiners. They will be stored on a password locked computer and only I will have access to this computer and know the password. You have the right at any time to ask for extra information about this project and you are free to refuse to participate. If you change your mind at any point you are free to do so.

- Do you feel that you have enough information about the project?
- Would you like to ask me anything about the project at this point?
- Do you understand that you do not have to participate in this research?
- Would you like to be involved in this project?

(At this point the interpreter verbally asked the participant the above questions. If the participant was happy to participant the interpreter read out the oral consent form and consent was recorded on a voice recorder)

How to contact me?

If you have any questions or concerns about the project or the manner in which the study is conducted please contact myself on 9803711461 or WHR on 97714446020. If this is unsuccessful, or not appropriate, please contact the Secretary at the Queen Mary Research Ethics Committee, Room W117, Queen's Building, Mile End Campus, Mile End Road, London or research-ethics@qmul.ac.uk.

Appendix 10: Information sheet for oral histories

Information sheet

Well-being amongst Nepali Widows (simplified title)

(This was read out to all participants before participating)

Name: Suzy Solley
Moblie: 9803711461
Email: s.solley@qmul.ac.uk

I would like to invite you to be part of this research about the experience of widowhood in the Kathmandu Valley. You should only agree to take part if you want to; please note participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to take part there will not be any disadvantages for you and you will hear no more about it.

Please listen to the following information carefully before you decide to take part; I will tell you why I am undertaking this research and what you will be asked to do if you take part. Please ask if anything is unclear or if you would like more information. If you decide to take part you will be asked to verbally confirm on the voice recorder that you agree. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Why am I undertaking this project?

I am a student studying at Queen Mary University in London. I have undertaken research on widows in Nepal previously and I am concerned about the difficulties and problems that Nepalese widows and women face. So, I have come to Nepal to carry out research on the

well-being of Nepalese widows. There is little research on the situation of widows in Nepal, which is why I am undertaking this research. I also hope that the research generated will help towards improving the lives of widowed women.

What does participating involve?

I will need about an hour and a half of your time for this oral history. The oral history will involve an informal conversation about your life, from childhood until the present day. You will not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. After the focus group, with your permission, I would like to take some photographs.

I will, with your permission, video record and tape record this interview, so that I can transcribe the conversation we had after. This recording will be detailed once I have transcribed the oral history. If you choose to participate, your views and opinions will be kept completely anonymous and no one will be able to identify that you took part in this research. The only people who will be able to view these are my interpreter, my supervisors and my PhD examiners. They will be stored on a password locked computer and only I will have access to this computer and know the password. You have the right at any time to ask for extra information about this project and you are free to refuse to participate. If you change your mind at any point you are free to do so.

- Do you feel that you have enough information about the project?
- Would you like to ask me anything about the project at this point?
- Do you understand that you do not have to participate in this research?
- Would you like to be involved in this project?

(At this point the interpreter verbally asked the participant the above questions. If the participant was happy to participant the interpreter read out the oral consent form and consent was recorded on a voice recorder)

How to contact me?

If you have any questions or concerns about the project or the manner in which the study is conducted please contact myself on 9803711461 or WHR on 97714446020. If this is unsuccessful, or not appropriate, please contact the Secretary at the Queen Mary Research Ethics Committee, Room W117, Queen's Building, Mile End Campus, Mile End Road, London or research-ethics@qmul.ac.uk.

Appendix 11: Information sheet for focus groups

Information sheet

Well-being amongst Nepali Widows (simplified title)

(This was read out to all participants before participating)

Name: Suzy Solley
Moblie: 9803711461
Email: s.solley@qmul.ac.uk

I would like to invite you to be part of this research about the experience of widowhood in the Kathmandu Valley. You should only agree to take part if you want to; please note participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to take part there will not be any disadvantages for you and you will hear no more about it.

Please listen to the following information carefully before you decide to take part; I will tell you why I am undertaking this research and what you will be asked to do if you take part. Please ask if anything is unclear or if you would like more information. If you decide to take part you will be asked to verbally confirm on the voice recorder that you agree. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Why am I undertaking this project?

I am a student studying at Queen Mary University in London. I have undertaken research on widows in Nepal previously and I am concerned about the difficulties and problems that Nepalese widows and women face. So, I have come to Nepal to carry out research on the

well-being of Nepalese widows. There is little research on the situation of widows in Nepal, which is why I am undertaking this research. I also hope that the research generated will help towards improving the lives of widowed women.

What does participating involve?

I will need about an hour and a half of your time for this focus group. The focus group will involve an informal conversation about life as a widow in Nepal and some group exercises. There will be questions related to the experience of widowhood in Nepal, the issues you face as a widowed women and what a 'good life' means to you. You will not have to answer any questions or do any activities you are uncomfortable with. After the focus group, with your permission, I would like to take some photographs.

I will, with your permission, video record and tape record this interview, so that I can transcribe the conversation we had after. These recordings will be detailed once I have transcribed the interview. If you choose to participate, your views and opinions will be kept completely anonymous and no one will be able to identify that you took part in this research. The only people who will be able to view these are my interpreter, my supervisors and my PhD examiners. They will be stored on a password locked computer and only I will have access to this computer and know the password. You have the right at any time to ask for extra information about this project and you are free to refuse to participate. If you change your mind at any point you are free to do so.

As you are aware you are all participating in this focus group together. This is a safe space where you can share your stories; please respect this by not talking about other people's experiences outwith the focus group. You will all be asked to maintain each other's confidentiality.

• Do you feel that you have enough information about the project?

• Would you like to ask me anything about the project at this point?

• Do you understand that you do not have to participate in this research?

• Would you like to be involved in this project?

(At this point the interpreter verbally asked the participant the above questions. If the participant was happy to participant the interpreter read out the oral consent form and consent was recorded on a voice recorder)

How to contact me?

If you have any questions or concerns about the project or the manner in which the study is conducted please contact myself on 9803711461 or WHR on 97714446020. If this is unsuccessful, or not appropriate, please contact the Secretary at the Queen Mary Research Ethics Committee, Room W117, Queen's Building, Mile End Campus, Mile End Road, London or research-ethics@qmul.ac.uk.

Appendix 12: Information sheet for key informant interviews

Information sheet

Well-being amongst Nepali Widows (simplified title)

Name: Suzy Solley
Moblie: 9803711461
Email: s.solley@qmul.ac.uk

I would like to invite you to be part of this research about widowhood in Nepal. Given your expert position your contributions will be integral to this work. You should only agree to take part if you want to; please note participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to take part there will not be any disadvantages for you and you will hear no more about it.

Please listen to the following information carefully before you decide to take part; I will tell you why I am undertaking this research and what you will be asked to do if you take part. Please ask if anything is unclear or if you would like more information. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Why am I undertaking this project?

I am a student studying at Queen Mary University in London. I have undertaken research on widows in Nepal previously and I am concerned about the difficulties and problems that Nepalese widows and women face. So, I have come to Nepal to carry out research on the well-being and agency of Nepali widows. As you may be aware, there is little research on the situation of widows in Nepal, which is why I am

undertaking this research. I also hope that the research generated will help towards improving the lives of widowed women.

What does participating involve?

I will need about an hour of your time for this interview. The interview will involve a discussion about your organisation, its focus on gender equality and the issues widowed women face in Nepal. You will not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with.

I will, with your permission, video record and tape record this interview, so that I can transcribe the conversation we had after. This recording will be detailed once I have transcribed the interview. If you choose to participate, your views and opinions will be kept completely anonymous and no one will be able to identify that you took part in this research. The only people who will be able to view these are my interpreter, my supervisors and my PhD examiners. They will be stored on a password locked computer and only I will have access to this computer and know the password. You have the right at any time to ask for extra information about this project and you are free to refuse to participate. If you change your mind at any point you are free to do so.

• Do you feel that you have enough information about the project?
• Would you like to ask me anything about the project at this point?
• Do you understand that you do not have to participate in this research?
• Would you like to be involved in this project?

How to contact me?

If you have any questions or concerns about the project or the manner in which the study is conducted please contact myself on 9803711461 or WHR on 97714446020. If this is unsuccessful, or not appropriate, please contact the Secretary at the Queen Mary Research Ethics

Committee, Room W117, Queen's Building, Mile End Campus, Mile End Road, London or research-ethics@qmul.ac.uk.

Appendix 13: Consent form

Consent form

This form will be completed after the participant has listened to/read to the information sheet.

Title of Study: Well-being amongst Nepali Widows (simplified title)
Queen Mary Research Ethics Committee Ref: QMREC2013/45

•Thank you for considering taking part in this research.

•If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher (Suzy Solley) before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

Have you been given the information on the information sheet……..yes/no
Do you understand the participation is entirely voluntary?.....yes/no
Do you understand that you can withdraw information at any point without having to give a reason?.....yes/no
Are you happy to let this interview be recorded?.....yes/no
Have you been offered the chance to ask questions?.....yes/no
Have you received enough information on this study?.....yes/no
Are you happy to be video recorded? (for focus groups only)……..yes/no

Do you agree to keep all the information disclosed in the focus group confidential? (for focus groups only)……yes/no

Are you happy to be photographed? (not for key informant interviews)……..yes/no

Do you understand the data storage procedure for photos and video's (not for key informant interviews)……..yes/no

Do you understand who will be able to see the videos and photos (not for key informant interviews)……..yes/no

Are you satisfied with the procedures and happy to commence your participation……..yes/no

Do you consent to the processing of your personal information for the purposes of this research study……..yes/no

Do you understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998……..yes/no

Participant's Statement:

I *(participant's name and associated recorded file on the mp3 file was documented here and in the case of key informant interviews they signed here)* agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have listened to both the notes above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Date:

Investigator's Statement:

I *(Suzy Solley)* confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and any foreseeable risks *(where applicable)* of the proposed research to the volunteer

How to contact me?

If you have any questions or concerns about the project or the manner in which the study is conducted please contact myself on 9803711461 or WHR on 97714446020. If this is unsuccessful, or not appropriate, please contact the Secretary at the Queen Mary Research Ethics Committee, Room W117, Queen's Building, Mile End Campus, Mile End Road, London or research-ethics@qmul.ac.uk.